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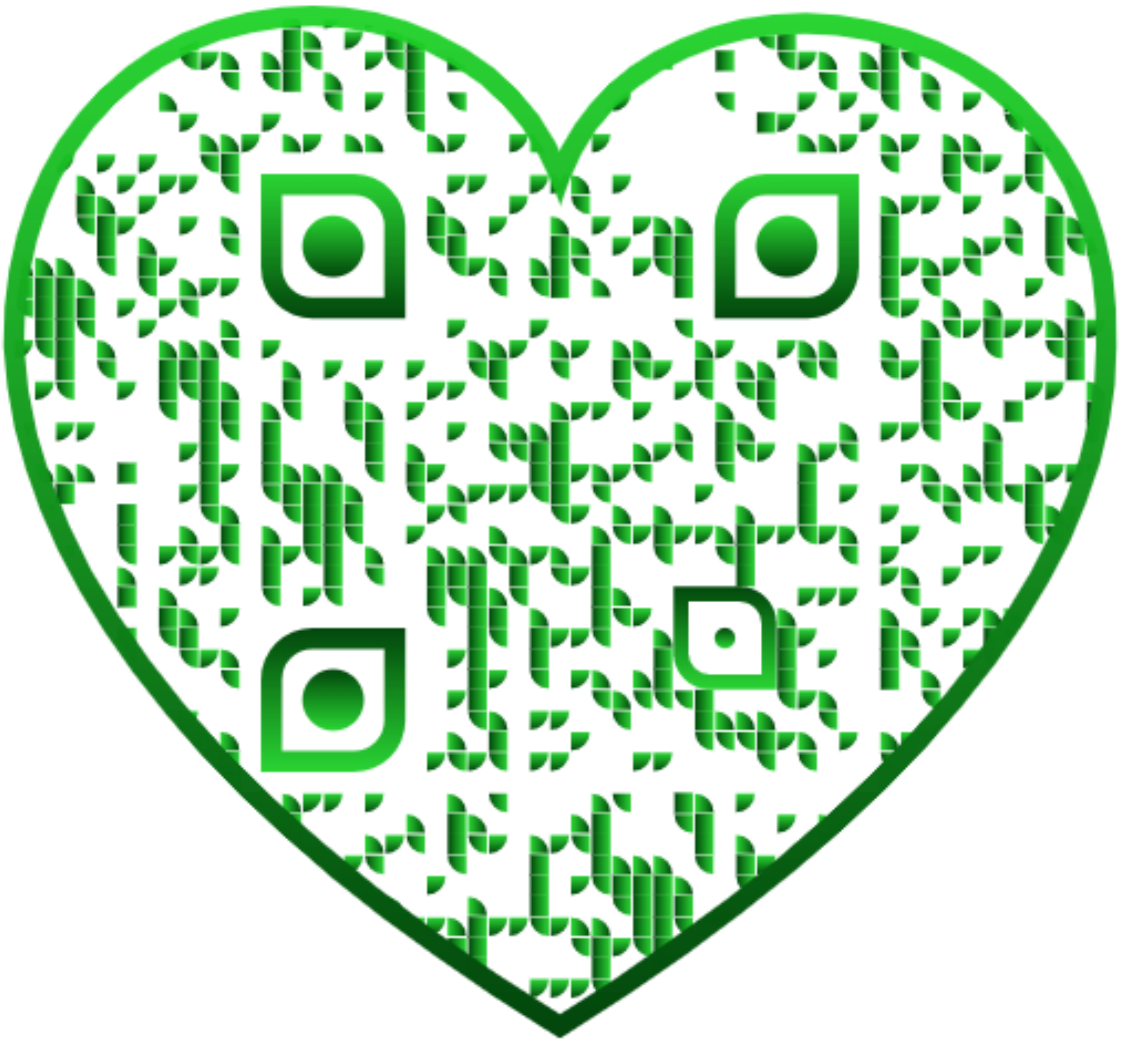

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YOU WANTED THE BEST

IT HAPPENED IN Detroit, 1975. After releasing three albums that had little impact on the charts, Kiss got a major foothold when their single "Rock and Roll All Nite" connected with Detroit radio listeners. Seemingly overnight, Kiss were everywhere. And if, like me, you were a local youngster, they were just about the only thing any of your peers were talking about.

To be honest, I didn't "get" Kiss until years later, once the pressure was off and I could take them on my own terms. I came to appreciate the raw power and pure fun that they brought to music, bridging the void between glammy proto punks like the Stooges and New York Dolls and the first wave of punk that delivered the Ramones and Sex Pistols. In an era of musical bombast, Kiss stayed true to the template of meat-and-potatoes rock and roll, weaving it with folk, heavy metal and pop. As over the top as their stage shows were, and remained, and for all their commercialism, Kiss delivered musical variety and high-energy excitement. Much of that was down to guitarist Paul Stanley, whose songs were equal parts swagger and slashing power chords, and whose guitar playing channeled the rhythmic riffery of Keith Richards and, in his lead work, the technical influence of Paul Kossoff and inspired melodism of Jimmy Page.

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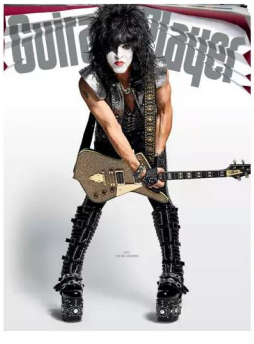
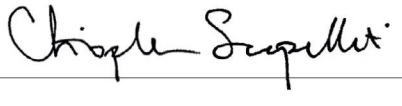


And now it's coming to a close. On December 2, Kiss will play their final concert, at Madison Square Garden, in their hometown of New York City. The timing was perfect for us to raise a salute to the band, and for that we called on renowned Kiss expert Ken Sharp. As all Kiss fans know, Ken is the co-author, with David Leaf, of the essential Kiss tome *KISS: Behind the Mask — The Official Authorized Biography*. It's due to his research and enduring appreciation for the group that this issue's celebration includes not only new interviews with Paul and Gene Simmons but also Kiss guitarist Tommy Thayer, Kiss drummer Eric Singer and OG Kiss members Ace Frehley and Peter Criss. Ken also checked in with Kiss fans Joe Perry, Rick Nielsen, Phil Collen and John 5 and discovered just how deeply Paul, and Kiss, inspired each of them.

Whether Kiss are or aren't your thing, I hope you find this issue enlightening and rewarding. For the true fans, we've created two collectible covers: a newsstand edition featuring Paul, Gene and Tommy, and the Paul Stanley solo version shipped to our subscribers. If one is "never enough" (to borrow a phrase from Mr. Stanley), both are available on magazinesdirect.com.



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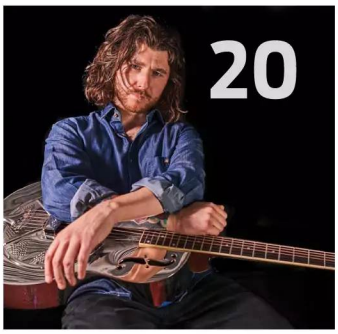

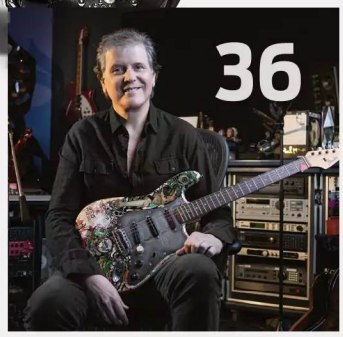

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Kiss — Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons and Tommy Thayer — photographed by Jen Rosenstein

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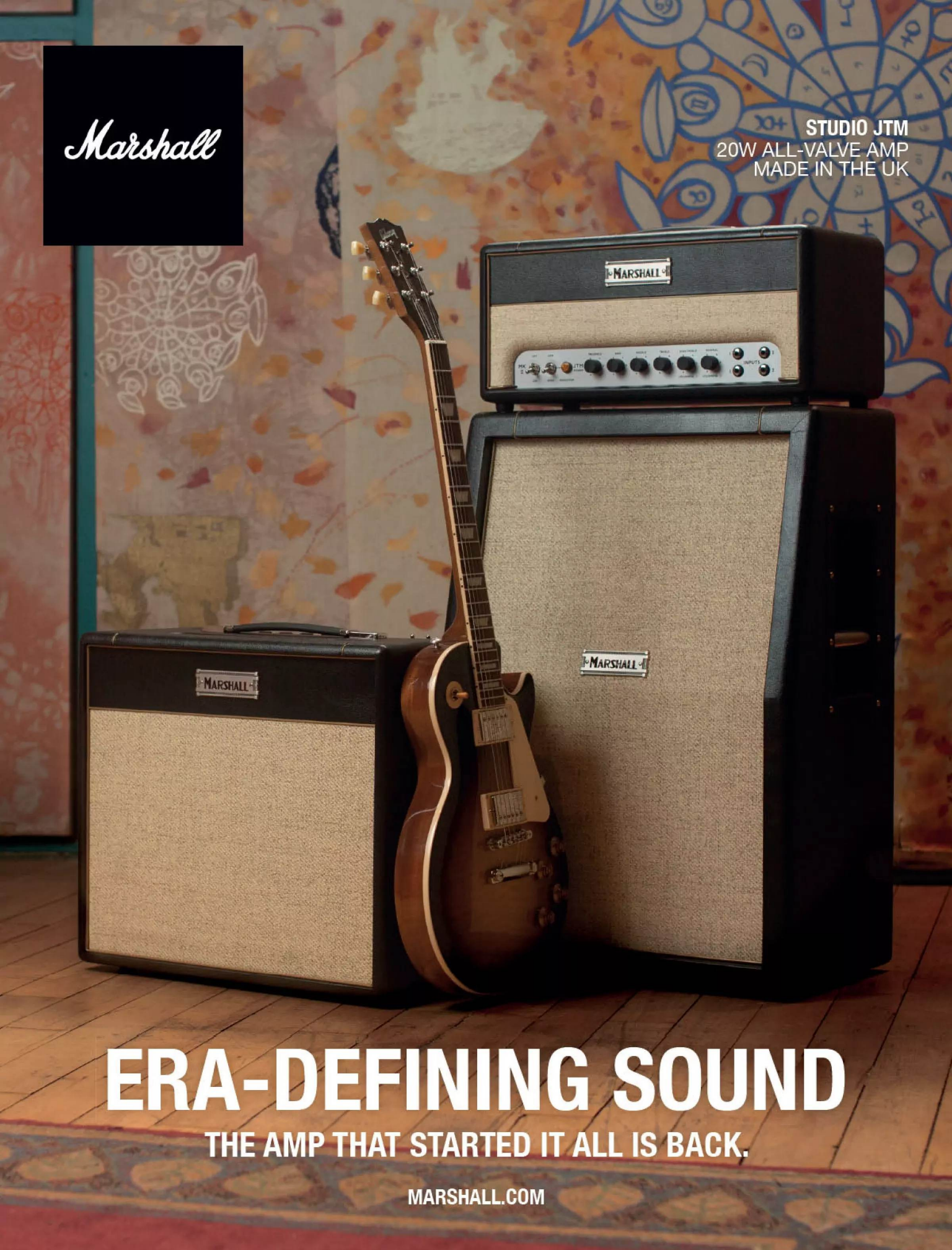
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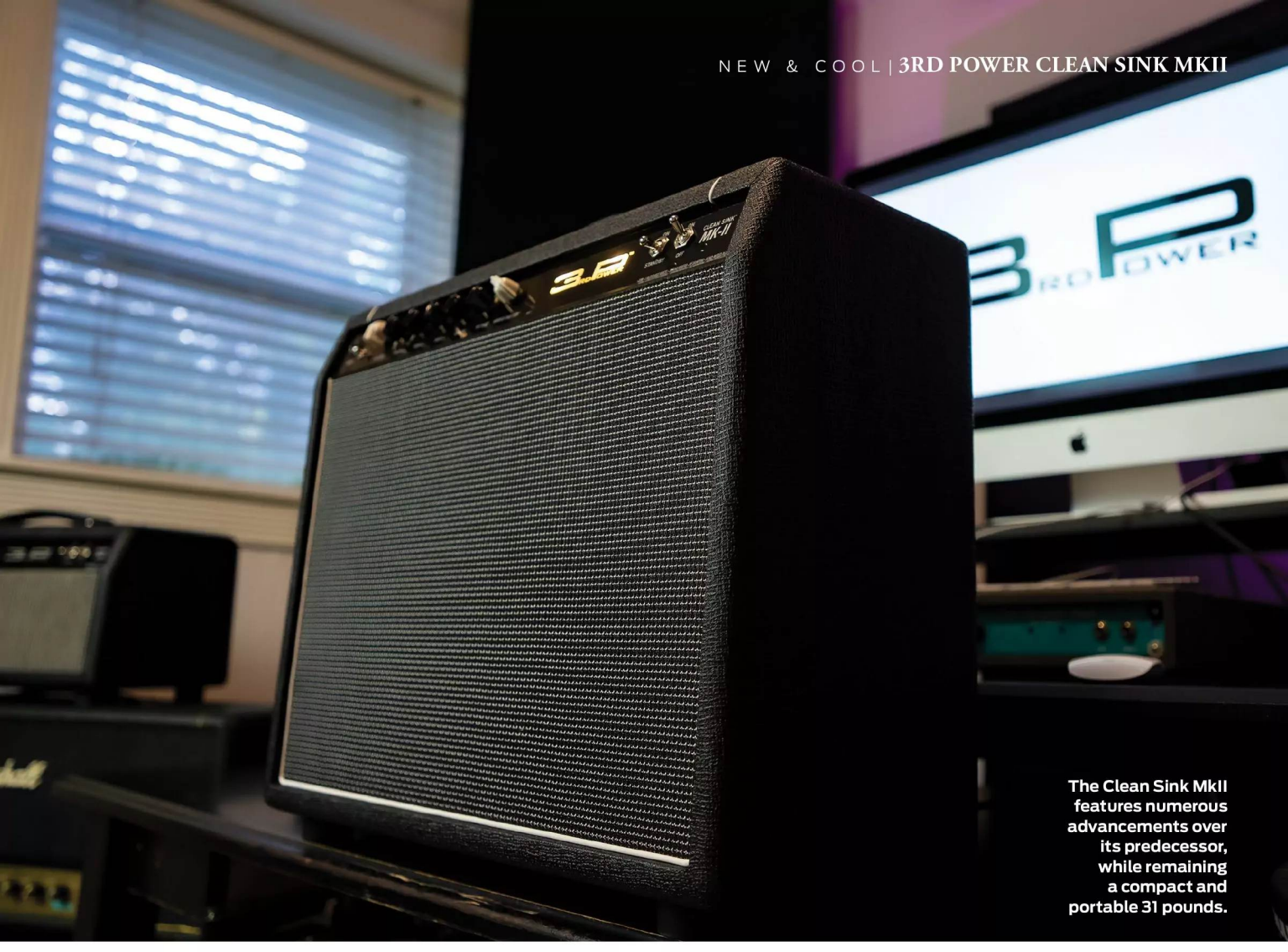

The Clean Sink MkII features numerous advancements over its predecessor, while remaining a compact and portable 31 pounds.

CLEAN SWEEP

With its trio of unique controls, **3rd Power's Clean Sink MkII** delivers three blendable iconic amp tones in one game-changing tube combo.

BY DAVE HUNTER

AS MODERN GUITARISTS lean toward digital solutions in their quest for optimal amp tone, many tube-amp makers are redefining this 100-year-old technology to suit current-day demands. To that end, acclaimed Nashville-based brand 3rd Power offers up its Clean Sink MkII as the optimal, gigable, classic-clean amp, with stealth-like versatility for the 21st century.

A former touring and recording guitarist, 3rd Power's founder and head designer Dylana Nova Scott has earned a stellar reputation for thinking outside the box to pack unprecedented versatility into tube amps that otherwise follow rather classic templates. The company's Kitchen Sink 6VEL, for example, seeks to run the gamut of American and British clean-to-dirty tones via a control panel far less dizzying than those of many foot-switchable, multi-channel amps. Likewise, the company's now-deleted Dreamweaver and Dual Citizen straddled both side of the tonal pond with an authenticity that won many users.

An amp designed purely to achieve the world's finest clean tones at usable stage and studio volumes might not, at first glance, appear to follow the same versatility premise. However, there's a lot of flexibility within the Clean Sink MkII's control interface, thanks largely to three knobs that extend its voicing and volume capabilities beyond the standard gain and EQ controls. In addition to the traditional volume, treble, bass and reverb, it boasts controls for:

Voicing: With a range from AM to AC, the voicing control rolls continually between American/Fender and British/Vox, with a broad range of blendability in between. A two-way Normal/T-Boost switch alongside the single input further refines the Voxy reaches of its fully clockwise rotation.

HF Damp: This high-frequency cut control sweetens up the frequency range and avoids harsh highs (particularly useful when the amp is used onstage with in-ear monitors).

Hybrid-Master: 3rd Power's patented take on the master-volume control, it governs overall volume levels without altering basic gain and EQ responses.

The foundation for all this is an all-tube circuit with four 12AX7s in the preamp, reverb and phase-inverter stages, and two 6V6GTs in the output stage in Class AB fixed bias. Rectification is solid-state, and the power stage hits the output tubes pretty hard,

delivering 425VDC at the plates for the clarity and headroom we associate with Fender's high-plate-voltage 6V6 amps of the mid to late '60s.

The combo cab measures 19.8 by 16 by 9.5 inches and weighs 31 pounds. The overall format is akin to the clean classic for club and studio, the Princeton Reverb, but as we've already seen there's a whole lot more going on here. If the Clean Sink MkII represents a paring down of the philosophy of the original Kitchen Sink — an amp that, as the name implies, sought to give players everything they could want, from clean to crunch to mean — it also embodies its do-it-all attitude, albeit limited to the clean side of the gain spectrum.

"Ever since we debuted the Kitchen Sink amplifier back in 2017, players have been reaching out to us asking if we'd ever make a lower-powered version of the separate channels," Scott tells *GP*. "We did that in the summer of 2019 with the Clean Sink and the Dirty Sink, which did well for us and made a lot of players happy. However, they had inherent production challenges as well as limitations to what the chassis and the enclosure could accommodate as far as future development.

"When the pandemic hit, supply-chain issues dictated that we look at our core amp models and streamline production based on materials and components that we could get on a consistent basis from our reliable suppliers. We streamlined our chassis to two versions: the Wooly Coats chassis, similar in size to a Fender Princeton, and the Kitchen Sink, our standard flagship mid-sized multichannel chassis that we've employed for the past 10 years."

"ALUMINUM CHASSIS SOUND MORE OPEN THAN STEEL CHASSIS — MORE TRANSPARENT AND TONEFUL"

3rd Power founder and head designer Dylana Nova Scott holds the chassis for a Clean Sink MkII.

At the same time she was redesigning the two new chassis for a more efficient layout, Scott decided to make them from aluminum. This not only makes for a lighter amp but also brings its own sonic benefits, as aluminum has greater conductivity than steel.

"Aluminum chassis sound more open than steel chassis," Scott reveals. "I know this because I built two identical amps, one on steel, one on aluminum. I recorded each one with the same tubes and the controls all set to the same metered values to remove as many variables as possible. The aluminum chassis was unquestionably more transparent and toneful than the steel chassis." In fact, many notable tube-amp designers have made the same observations; the legendary Ken Fischer of Trainwreck Circuits, for one, told me much the same thing in the early 2000s before he passed away.

Other advances in the MkII included improved ventilation throughout the chassis and LibraCAD design to accommodate tube-socket and component positioning for the future development of any conceivable amp. A neater layout on the hand-wired turret board saves upwards of 24 inches of connecting wire and takes only seven hours to build rather than the 14 hours of the MkI circuit. Scott has also given the combo a "just right" cabinet that comfortably houses her favorite speaker — the Celestion Alnico Gold — while remaining compact and portable.

While testing the Clean Sink MkII with a Telecaster, a Jazzmaster and a Les Paul, I immediately bonded with its rich, clear, articulate clean tones, and was seduced by its easy attainment of that often-elusive ability to be inspiringly euphonic without

A triangular opening in the back panel reveals the Celestion Alnico Gold's bell cover.

The voicing control rolls continually between American and British tones.

leaning on the aural crutch that distortion often provides. Where so many modern nothing-but-clean amps (or amp channels) can sound sterile and soulless, the Clean Sink MkII does that magical thing that has kept us falling in love with vintage Princeton Reverbs, Deluxe Reverbs, AC15s and the like: Its ostensibly undistorted tones still feel extremely dynamic and playable and inspiring under the fingertips, while it issues the girth and dimension and harmonic swirl that help your playing stand out in the mix or onstage.

All that, and its ability to segue between the American and British versions thereof, is truly jaw-dropping. Scott's voicing knob is an impressive feature indeed, and the mini toggle that jumps you from the warmer Normal channel AC tone to the brighter, bitier Top Boost rendition is the icing on the cake. Just when this might all get a little too ice-picky, the HF Damp control comes to the rescue to tailor the treble content to ear-friendly proportions, and the Hybrid-Master — a 3rd Power feature that has impressed me in past reviews — really does taper the output levels to suit a variety of rooms without noticeably

changing the amp's tone. The reverb sounds lush and multi-dimensional, too, although it might get deep and wet rather quickly for players who like just a touch of the effect in their tone.

With the volume maxed and the Hybrid-Master at noon or beyond, the Clean Sink MkII will deliver just a little edge-of-breakup clipping that eases into bluesy lead and rock and roll territory, but it also handles overdrive pedals very well when dialed back into cleaner realms. A Wampler Tumnus Deluxe, a Victory the Duchess and a Tsakalis Six all interacted beautifully with the combo, and easily negated any desire for a foot-switchable lead channel or the like. All in all, it's just a great and versatile amp that's beautifully suited to a wide range of playing needs today, and one that I will have trouble parting with.

"I'm passionate about tone," Scott tells us, summing up her design philosophy. "I'm a three-times-patented inventor. I even enjoyed a professional recording and touring career in the '80s and '90s and have been working in the M.I. world since 1986. As the gear world has changed over the past four decades, I've been there along the way, and today is no different. Players need inspiring tools to create and deliver their heart, soul and music to their audience, without any loss in translation. That's what I do. That's what 3rd Power does."

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Dom Martin poses with his Ozark 3615 Deluxe Resonator Palm Tree.

BELFAST BLUESMAN

He's dealt with personal demons and Rory Gallagher's ghost. On *Buried in the Hail*, **Dom Martin** shows he's come out stronger for it.

BY JIM BEAUGEZ | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM HEAL

RISING U.K. BLUES guitartist Dom Martin has seen more than enough darkness in his lifetime. While struggling with his own demons in his early 20s, he watched as his father — his guitar mentor and chief musical inspiration — succumbed to the ravages of alcoholism. Martin has been kidnapped and beaten by thugs in Belfast, confident it would be his last stand. And his obsession with music has ruined most of his relationships with those brave enough to get close.

But with four years of sobriety under his belt and a trio of acclaimed blues albums to his credit, Martin is beginning to see the light. "I have the capacity for change," he says, speaking to *Guitar Player* from his home in Ireland. "And that's strength, that's resolve, that's resilience. It took me a long time to realize that."

Martin plays like a man determined on his third and latest album, *Buried in the Hail* (Forty Below Records), alternating between furious, fuzz-laden licks on "Unhinged" and country slide-blues straight out of northern Mississippi's Hill Country on "Daylight I Will Find" and "Belfast Blues." His fretwork shines, particularly on the album's quieter moments, while his fingerpicking shows the versatility of a committed guitar fanatic on the tracks "Hello in There" and "The Fall."

"Music is the love of my life," he says. "I get so much enjoyment from it now that I really don't need anything else, and I'm willing to sacrifice everything for it."

With no question about his true north, Martin spoke with *GP* about his determination to make an album he could be proud of, the gear behind it, and how Rory Gallagher keeps popping into the frame.

You grew up playing the blues in Ireland. How did you come up on guitar and music?
My dad was a guitar player. He did pub gigs and club gigs, some session work. Very low-key. He was a very troubled man, but he

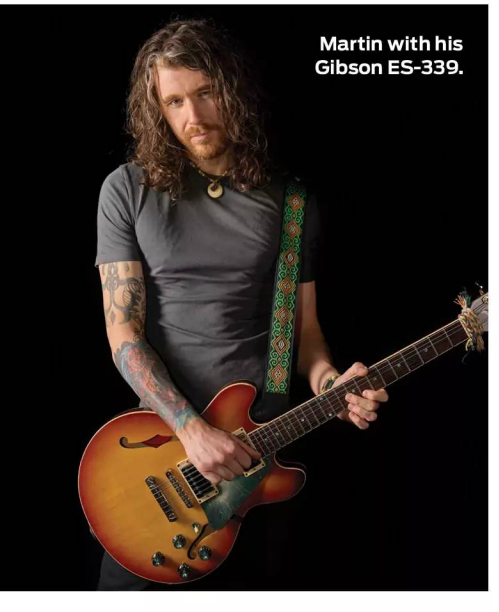
was one of the best guitar players I've ever heard. For me and my dad, it was always an outlet, a form of therapy, and I would encourage everybody to pick up an instrument because it really does unlock something that's missing in a lot of people. It's a creative thing. If you come into it with the intent that it's a competition, you're already screwed.

How did your father foster your interest in guitar?

I always was asking him to teach me this, teach me that — just getting him to show me as much as I could. He took me to see [*U.K. folk guitarist*] Ralph McTell when I was about 10 years old, at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast. I realized just how good my dad was, because Ralph McTell's a phenomenal guitar player — a really good fingerpicker and songwriter — and I realized that my dad was doing versions of his songs that Ralph McTell wouldn't even be able to produce. My dad put more soul, life and heart into it.

On your earlier records, you mostly played a kind of Chicago-style electric blues, but you've really dug into country blues and slide playing since then.

This album is completely me. I didn't let anybody compromise it whatsoever. I stuck to my guns on it the whole way through, from start to finish. I set the amps the way I wanted them set. I set the guitars up the way I needed them to be set up. Even in the mixing process, I was on the phone to them, I was emailing them, saying, "Don't touch this. Leave it alone. I don't care what your thoughts are on it. I really couldn't care less if it sounds like crap to you. To me, that's what I want. And I'm sticking to that."



Martin with his Gibson ES-339.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Buried in the Hail

"Daylight I Will Find," "Government," "Belfast Blues," "Hello in There," "Buried in the Hail"

One of the surprises on *Buried in the Hail* is how you turned the country standard "Crazy" into a minor-key blues dirge.

I was outta my mind when I came up with the chord structure for that, and I was struggling with the lyrics, but they just fit so well for the time that I found myself in when I was getting this album together. I wrote the album in two days at a friend's house in between tours, and the moment was just right. I had peace. I had quiet. I had all my equipment there in the van, and I set everything up and started writing, and I just flew. It was insane. I didn't think we were gonna get permission to do that song. I'm very proud of that, because I wouldn't want to just copy and paste what Patsy Cline and Willie Nelson had done. I wanted those lyrics to feel like I wrote them and for the song to feel a little bit original.

"IF YOU COME INTO IT WITH THE INTENT THAT IT'S A COMPETITION, YOU'RE ALREADY SCREWED"

As you mentioned, you took full control over the guitar tones this time. Where did you begin?

My Gibson ES-339, mostly. On most of the songs, that was the sound I wanted. The pickups are PAF types: '59s [*the Mule*] from Bare Knuckle. After that, a place called House of Tone pickups sent me a set of their Peter Green PAFs [*Tru PAFs*]. I wish I'd have had them for the album, 'cause that's the sound I needed. I was like, "Ah, if you had come to me a couple of months ago, that's what would've been on that album!" But it's a great guitar. I can't take it on tour, 'cause I'm scared of losing it or breaking it, so it's only gonna be on that album and maybe the next one.

What amps and pedals do you pair those up with?

I love tweed amps, even the newer stuff. I've never really tried anything older than, like, the '90s era. I started with a Peavey Classic 50, and I'll never part with it — that was my first valve amp. After that, I sold a guitar for a Fender DeVille tweed. It has the bias pot. I've painted that red and I use it with a Marshall 4x12, and that's the setup at the moment. It's alnico speakers — I've got two blues and one alnico cream in the 4x12, and some unidentifiable thing, but it sounds good. I use the same setup for acoustic that I do for electric, so there's no need for a DI and different stuff.

I use a Flynn Amps Hawk boost, which is the Rory Gallagher signature pedal, and that goes into an overdrive pedal made for me by my amp tech. I have no idea what it is; I just like the sound it makes. And then in the effects loop, there's a lot of stuff I don't need. It's overkill for, like, 90 percent of the stuff I do, but I like it at home for ambience and just finding stuff for the fun of it.

Did Rory's shadow loom large as a blues player in Ireland?

Yeah. I was on tour with Eric Gales last year, and Izzy Buholzer [*of Gulfcaster Custom Guitars*] got in touch in Florida. He said, "Dom, I wanna build you a guitar." I said, "I have no money, but if I ever do, I'll get back to you, 'cause I've got a great idea." He said, "Dom, you don't understand. I'm gonna build you a guitar. I don't want your money. I love what you do." I said, "I always wanted to play a Strat, but I could never get along with them. Imagine Rory Gallagher's Strat was always a Telecaster. That's what I want." It took him a couple of days to get back to me, but he did it. The scary thing is, I was in Holland doing a gig for Rory's birthday at a festival, and the guitar got stuck at customs. It turned up at my house on Rory's birthday while I was playing in Holland for his birthday. I couldn't believe it. It's a coincidence, but it's like Rory's trying to say hello or something.

Feeling self-absorbed? Check out John's first tip.

TIP SHEET

"I try not to suck." **John Petrucci** reveals the five rules that keep him at peak performance.

BY JOE BOSSO

OVER THE COURSE of his nearly 40-year career, Dream Theater guitar god John Petrucci has played thousands of shows across the globe. And guess what? Not all of them have been perfect. "Oh, yes, I'm mortal," he says with a laugh. "Even though I try to nail all of my parts night after night, I'm going to screw up occasionally. It happens."

How does Petrucci not allow onstage flubs to bother him? By simply choosing not to get rattled. "The worst thing you can do is beat yourself up when you make a mistake," he says. "If you start to become too self-conscious, you'll get in a downward spiral and you'll make another mistake. Before you know it, you've made a string of mistakes and your whole gig will be a disaster, all because you chose to dwell on one little screw-up that probably nobody else even noticed. Things go by so fast — a lot of people never catch that error you made. On the other hand, if you blatantly call attention to yourself, believe me, people will notice."

He admits that it used to be easier to shrug off onstage goofs. "In the days before cell phones and the internet, if you messed up something onstage, it was over and you could just move on," he says. "Now, whenever I've got a really difficult part to play, I'll catch a glimpse of the audience and there's hundreds of phones pointed at me. Everybody's filming me, and I know that video is going to go online for hundreds of thousands of people to see. That can mess with your head, if you let it."

At that split second when he might freeze, Petrucci distracts himself by focusing on something else. He'll look at his bandmates, or gaze out over the heads of his audience and stare toward the back of the venue. Sometimes he'll spot somebody in the crowd — a kid air guitaring, totally lost in the music — and, just like that, he snaps out of it. "You can't stay absorbed in your own thoughts when you see people so excited by what you're doing," he says. "That's the moment when you realize, This is why we're here."

These days, Petrucci tries to live by a motto he adopted from Neal Schon: "I try not to suck." "Neal said that to me and my wife, Rena, one night when we were at a Journey show," he recalls. "We complimented him on his playing, and that's what he said. I was like, You know what? That really sums it up. That's all any of us can do."

Petrucci offers more sage advice for guitarists looking to perform at their best onstage.

1 IMAGINE YOU'RE IN THE AUDIENCE

"Playing gigs can be challenging. There's a lot that transpires in your life, leading up to the moments when you walk onstage. Some days everything is going right for you, and you hit the stage on top of the world. Other times, things aren't so good. Maybe you're tired or sick. Maybe you ate a bad burrito. But guess what? Those are your problems — you can't take them out on your audience. This is a night of entertainment for them. They came out to hear you play music, and you owe them what they paid for. It's not a one-sided exchange.

"This is certainly true when you get to a high level and you're playing big places. People probably went to a lot of trouble and expense to come to your show. But even if you're playing clubs, you still have to adopt the mindset that the audience deserves your best. Try to imagine that you're in the audience and you're watching you. What do you see? Are you seeing somebody who respects them and is giving them a great performance? Or are you seeing somebody who's self-absorbed and has forgotten what this is all about?

"My thought process before going onstage is to remember the people who are in the audience — and why they're there. I respect them and value them, and I owe them a great experience."

2 MAKE SURE YOU'VE REHEARSED

"The kind of music I play onstage requires me to be on my game technically. When I'm on

SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

tour, I tend to treat my days like I'm going to the gym. I put in the time and I train. The way you focus on certain physical exercises when you're at the gym? That's what I do on the guitar. I look at parts of the show that are more difficult than others, and I spend time practicing those parts. I don't really go over the stuff that I know by heart; rather, I bear down and work on the stuff that isn't so easy. And I don't practice anything else — I only work on what I need to play onstage.

"A lot of time on the road, I'll have a good hour or so to rehearse. Other times, I might have just 15 minutes. If that's the case, I try to make the most of my time so that when I hit the stage, I've gone over the tricky parts and I feel like I can play them well.

"My routine changes when I go home and I have periods of time when I don't have to think about a show. That's when I can work on other things and develop my chops in other ways. But when I'm in tour mode, I make sure I'm super rehearsed for what I have to play at night."

3 WATCH WHAT YOU DO OFFSTAGE

"When I'm on tour, I try to think twice before engaging in certain recreational activities that might affect my playing. Even if it's something like bowling, which I don't do too often. But even then, I fast-forward to being onstage and having a sore wrist or a sprained finger or something. I have to consider if that hour of leisure time is worth the risk of something going wrong, and if I'll be kicking myself for weeks afterward. This kind of thing happens on tour: Your buddies want to go out hiking on a day off. Sounds great, right? But what if I'm onstage the next day and my legs are killing me? I know it sounds funny, but this is the kind of thing I have to think about.

"Again, when you're playing shows — at whatever level you're at — you have a responsibility to be at your best. Take drinking, for example: You might not be thinking about your gig when you're out at a restaurant enjoying your third Old Fashioned. The next thing you know, you're onstage and your brain is foggy — you certainly won't play a good show in that condition. Mentally and physically, you should try to avoid drinking when you have to play shows. I know our singer, James [LaBrie], won't drink when we're on tour — not a drop. He waits till we're off the road and he can have some Guinness."

"I'LL DO A VERY LIGHT WORKOUT — MAYBE 15 MINUTES BEFORE THE GIG. I HAVE TO CREDIT JOE SATRIANI WITH THAT"

4 WARM UP — BUT NOT TOO MUCH

"I've gone through trial and error when it comes to warming up before I show. I've done that thing where I practiced for two hours and thought I was oiled up, and then I walked onstage and my hands were fatigued. As soon as I played that first chord, I was like, Damn it, why did I do that? My hands were burned out, and the whole show was a struggle.

"There are guys who won't even touch a guitar before they play a show. They have this attitude of 'I want to be fresh.' I've tried that approach, but I think a certain amount of blood flow is needed before I play.

"Over time, I figured out that the best way for me to warm up is to do it earlier in the day. I'll go through all the difficult stuff I need to work on, but I'll leave enough space between practicing and the show itself. That way, I've got everything down, but I haven't left my whole game in the dressing room. You want to have some gas in the tank. If I do any playing right before a show, I'll do a very light workout — maybe 15 minutes before the gig. I have to credit Joe Satriani with that. I saw him do that kind of thing on a G3 tour, and I thought, That seems to work for him. I'll try that."

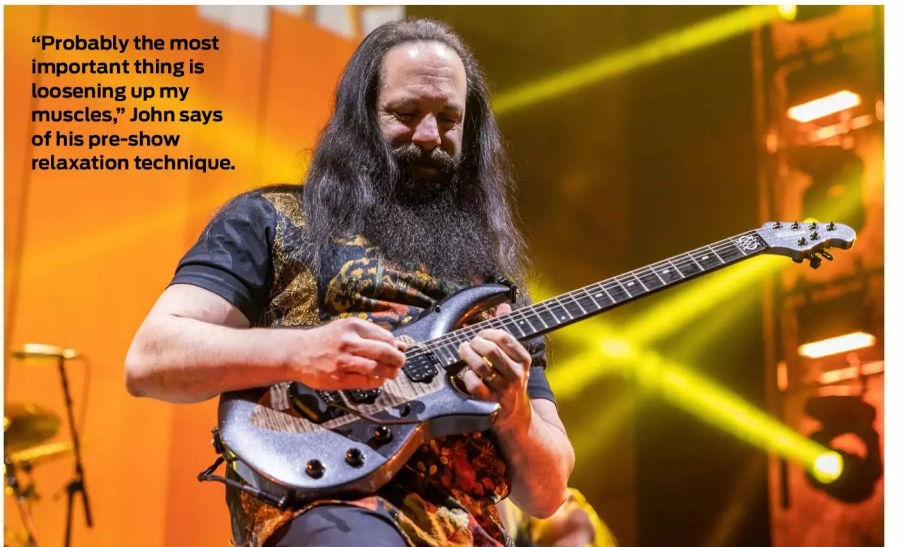
5 TRY TO RELAX

"Okay, you've rehearsed your material. You've picked out your stage clothes and dieted so you can get in your pants. Your beard is washed and trimmed. All the pieces are in place. The only problem is, you can't calm down. Trust me — nerves and anxiety are not your friends when it comes to playing live music. Whatever you can do, try to get into a relaxed headspace before you perform.

"There are things that I generally try to do so that I'm relaxed before I go onstage. Probably the most important thing is loosening up my muscles as if I'm about to do some sort of athletic activity. I'll do some stretches and shake out my arms, and I'll do some breathing exercises. It really works.

"I know some performers do the opposite — they'll do pull-ups and push-ups like they're getting ready for a football game. We did a tour with Animals as Leaders, and those guys traveled with weightlifting equipment. Some of them would exercise like mad right before they went onstage. I was like, 'I don't know how you do that.' I've tried working out before a show, but I found that it created more tension in my arms. Plus, it increased my heart rate, which is the opposite of what I wanted. I want to feel loose and fluid. I try to think about my nervous system and how I'm going to feel onstage.

"Some people drink coffee or espresso before I gig. I'll do that sometimes, but I try to time it right so that I'm alert but not jittery. If I've got a cold, which happens on tour, I won't take a decongestant before a show — that will definitely freak out my nerves. Everybody is different, so try things and see what works for you. But the point is to relax as best you can."



"Probably the most important thing is loosening up my muscles," John says of his pre-show relaxation technique.

PER OLE HAGEN/REDFERNS

(from left) Joe Knaggs and Peter Wolf at Knaggs' factory with Billy Idol guitarists Billy Morrison and Steve Stevens.

DREAM WEAVER

Joe Knaggs creates six-string masterpieces that ignite the senses and summon the muse.

BY ART THOMPSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS DORR

JOE KNAGGS HAS carved a stellar reputation for his craftsmanship and design skills since he and his business partner, Peter Wolf, left PRS Guitars in 2009 to form Knaggs Guitars. The Maryland-based guitar maker had a goal to make high-end instruments that offer awesome playability, leading-edge quality and attention to detail, as well as jaw-dropping finishes, including the two-tone schemes that Knaggs pioneered. Those are often with inlaid purfling dividing the colors, such as we saw on the Severn Trem SSS dressed in luscious Seafoam Green and TV Yellow reviewed in our December 2023 issue.

But that particular guitar represented just the tip of Knaggs' iceberg. The company lets buyers personalize their instruments with an extensive array of options in neck and body woods, hardware, pickups and finishes that are offered within the Chesapeake, Influence, Signature and Creation series. In doing so, Knaggs gives players incredible flexibility in the style of music they play and the tones they seek to achieve ultimate expression.

The Severn Trem SSS I had the pleasure of using for a few weeks during the peak of California's hot summer was a beautiful guitar with great playability and tones, and amazing tuning stability. One of the many things that impressed me was its innovative Chesapeake trem, a unique vibrato system in which the bridge pickup is surrounded by a steel plate, in Tele fashion, while the hinged bridge riding behind it rests on roller bearings that allow it to move with uncanny smoothness and return-to-pitch precision. *Stability* is the watchword here, so I asked Knaggs to detail how he combines it with ease of playing, and what role the woods he chooses play into the overall equation.

"That's kind of where it all begins," he explains. "There was a guy at our shop who had an SG that he couldn't keep in tune. I looked at the neck wood, and it was this punky mahogany that some overseas companies use — the same stuff they make cheap furniture out of. That's an extreme example of neck wood that you don't want to use. It could even be quarter-sawn, but it's just unstable. We're making all of our necks out of Honduran mahogany, and we have rock maple that we dry out properly and use it quarter-sawn.

"When I was a few years into it at PRS, I started carving necks, and Paul showed me a bunch of stuff. I actually carved some of the digitizing jigs that we used to make the neck shapes from, and that was something I got under my belt. When I feel different necks —

A rare example of a Knaggs acoustic, this Potomac in Aged Natural finish has a Dragon Fly inlay and koa binding.

A Kenai T in Tobacco BlackBurst finish.

Joe Knaggs' original Choptank, the first guitar he built.

like some Martins, for instance — they can be really deep, and there are good aspects to that and other aspects that are too extreme. So it's nice to blend them together, like in a slight V or a C shape. It makes for a neck that's really comfortable to play, but not overdoing it where you feel the V on the back of your hand. I've felt old Telecasters that are that way, and it's fine, but to me the ultimate goal is to have something that fits in your hand comfortably."

We hear a lot about diminishing supplies of quality wood. Has that been a problem for you?

We have a good supplier, but it's not as available as it used to be, and you have to go through a lot more wood to find the good stuff. I have a cutter that knows what I'm looking for, and he goes through it and finds us what we want. That really helps out a lot. I used to have to go to [*lumber company*] Alan McIlvain in Pennsylvania, and go through stacks of heavy, long pieces, and then we'd have to plane the edges and see what the quarter-sawn part of it looked like. I used to do that at PRS too. So the short answer is it's certainly not as readily available, but I haven't run into a big problem with that, and we're getting good curly maple, good mahogany, and good ebony and rosewood.

"THE CHOPTANK IS MY FAVORITE GUITAR. IT'S ANOTHER ARROW IN THE QUIVER FOR US"

Knaggs guitars are influenced by classic designs, but instead of rehashing those platforms you've developed guitars that are unique in their own way. How did you accomplish that?

People are used to playing Les Pauls, Stratocasters and Telecasters, and PRS could be in that context too. People are creatures of habit, and of course there's always that desire to play guitars that fit into that niche. If you look at the Choptank, which was the first guitar I built, I combined elements of the Telecaster and Stratocaster, but there are things I did that make it unique. With the Kenai, the shape is based on the Les Paul, and it's as thick as a Les Paul, but thinner at the neck. The body is also curved on the back. I wanted to make it so that it sort of wrapped around your body, with the belly carve and everything. So we optimized the thought of it being like a Les Paul, but we made it more comfortable to play and unique in its own way.

How did the Kenai evolve into so many other iterations?

People wanted a Tune-o-matic on it, so we did that. And then we did one with a wrap-around bridge, one with P90s and one with a five-way blade switch and a hum-single-hum configuration. We even put a Severn headstock on a Kenai. So there have been all these little Frankensteins of that model. However, in the end there's the Kenai, and that to me is two humbuckers, the Knaggs Influence bridge and the Kenai neck shape and headstock. But we've done variations of every model we've made.

Is that all in the interest of optimizing guitars to suit the needs of players?

I guess you could say we've optimized each model in that way, but usually in a business

like Fender, Gibson or PRS, there's a number of guitars you sell in a certain configuration, and that tells you what the public actually wants. And we've seen that with the Kenai. The Severn has been a little different, because we probably sell as many HSSs as we do ones with three single-coils, and I understand that. It's nice to have that humbucker back there so you can crank it up and not have the noise problems. And then we've done the Severn X, which has a flatter fingerboard and a little wider neck, and sometimes with humbuckers in it. But we haven't sold as many Xs as we have regular Severns.

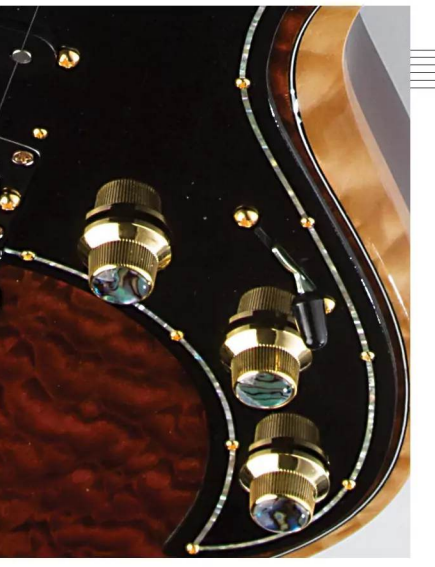
When you mention the Severn X, it brings to mind [*Knaggs signature artist*] Steve Stevens. And speaking of variations, you did an Evertune bridge for him.
Steve plays his SSC and the Severn SSXF all the time. We did the Evertune for him because we get a lot of R&D out of Steve. We figured, Let's try this and see what happens with it. So Steve plays it out there, and that's the big one to me.

A Chena in TV Yellow finish with a Severn headstock.

Didn't he also play a Chena?
He played the Chena onstage a long time ago. The Chena is based off the original Chesapeake. It's got a carved back and is hollow in the middle, so it's kind of a cross between what I did at PRS with the Hollowbody model, combined with that carved back of the original Chesapeake that I made. We've been getting a lot of inquiries about the Chena, and it's a great guitar for jazz and blues. It doesn't go quite to the ES-175 side, but it falls in between somewhere, so it's kind of a neat thing. We've made a guitar for just about every kind of player you can think of, but there's still some things we want to do. Like, I want to make the Chena completely hollow, with a trapeze tailpiece and all that so it's more along the lines of an ES-175. When I listen to Pat Metheny and George Benson, there's a sound they get from hollow guitars, and I wouldn't mind doing something like that.

Did the Ibanez George Benson influence any of your ideas for hollow guitars?
The Ibanez George Benson was exactly the guitar I thought of when I did the PRS Archtop. I love George Benson, and I love his guitar and the size of it. The Chena is definitely a spin-off on that.

You've mentioned that the Choptank, which is basically your take on a Tele, had a bridge design that inspired you to start a guitar company.
Yeah, that was the original bridge design, which goes hand in hand with a Tele. And we've got a trem version of that bridge, too. So that model is definitely one that goes along those lines. There are players in Nashville, like Ben Miller and bunch of others, who play the Choptank, and they love it. With the Strat, there have been all these Superstrats and variations on the theme, but people didn't do as many variations on the Telecaster. The Tele was kind of in the back, you know? But I think every single thing that's been done with the Strat you can do to a Telecaster. That's kind of the idea behind the Choptank Trem, which has a Telecaster



A Black Pearl from Knaggs' Creation Series of commissioned custom guitars.

pickup in it. People see that they can do trem stuff with a Telecaster sound. The Choptank is my favorite guitar, and my original one is what I play all the time. It's another arrow in the quiver for us, but I don't think anyone has really gone at it with that guitar yet.

Are there other guitars you'd like to make?
We have so many models that I don't think it's good for us to put anything else out there right now. We've been here for 13 years, and people are just starting to know who we are and what something like a Kenai is.

But, yes, there are a couple of things I have in mind that I want to try. I want to mess with the Chena. I was a jazz player growing up, and that sound is something you only get from a guitar that has a wooden bridge and a trapeze tailpiece and is hollow inside. Sure, you can play jazz on a Choptank, and it's an unbelievably great-sounding guitar. And Mike Stern played jazz on a Telecaster! But that whole George Benson/Pat Metheny thing is something I definitely have thoughts on doing.

I'd like to play around with some different acoustics, too. I've only made a hundred of them, and we don't even have it in our price list, because it's not something I want to gear up for in the shop. But I make them for myself and just hand-pick each one. I'm making four or five right now, so that's something I enjoy doing, and I've come up with some really good things on the design end with the way we carve the braces and where we carve them to get the most sound out of it.

"I'M ON THIS PLANET TO MAKE REALLY GOOD GUITARS FOR THE PURPOSE OF MAKING MUSIC"

Do you function like a custom shop in the sense that guitarists have so many different options for the models you offer?
I think we do, because with all the available options, you can have anything you want in one of our guitars. Customers can also make requests, although it depends on what it is and how it pertains to the model, especially if it's something I don't think will be a good thing for the guitar. Like, if someone says, "Will you make it out of oak?" that's a no. But we do have the Creation Series if someone really wants to go off. We don't do a lot of those, because I'm pretty busy, but I did just build a Chena with World War II fighter planes on it for a guy, so that's something we'll do.

But I'm on this planet to make really good guitars for the purpose of making music. Like, I'm watching this kid Matteo Mancuso play a Yamaha Pacifica, and he's tearing it to pieces. That's probably not *your* dream guitar, but when he's playing it, it might be just that for someone, and in the end they're going to be happy.

The thing is, people can dream up anything they want in a guitar, but in the end is it something they want to play? I'm up here in my room right now, looking at the original Choptank I made. I'm thinking to myself, The fingerboard is simple, and all the dots have turned yellow, and it's got the original Brazilian rosewood pickguard. I don't have a lot of time to play music, but there's something about it that makes me want to grab it and play. And that's the beauty of it.

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

These are the Genesis tracks that **Steve Hackett** regards as the best of his six-year tenure.

BY JOE MATERA

DURING THE COURSE of an illustrious career that has lasted more than 50 years, Steve Hackett has consistently explored a diverse musical cocktail, delving into everything from prog-rock and classical to blues and beyond. After making a name for himself as a guitarist with several English outfits in the late 1960s, including pop-rockers Quiet World, he came to worldwide acclaim with the English prog-rock group Genesis in 1971, featuring singer Peter Gabriel, drummer Phil Collins, keyboardist Tony Banks and bassist Mike Rutherford. Hackett's highly skilled technique and stylistically mixed bag were integral contributions to the group's ever-evolving sound on the six studio albums he contributed guitar to, but he departed Genesis in late 1977 to pursue a hugely prolific solo career that continues today.

Along the way, Hackett found time in the mid 1980s to assemble the short-lived supergroup GTR with Steve Howe from Yes, as well as appear as guest guitarist on numerous recordings by artists such as Box of Frogs, John Wetton and Steven Wilson, to name but a few.

Yet, it's his early work with Genesis that saw him inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2010, firmly solidifying his position in the pantheon of influential guitar greats. An innovative and creative guitarist of the highest order, he set the standard for many of the approaches and techniques that have become the vocabulary of any modern-day guitarist's modus operandi. His pioneering use of right-hand tapping is but one example.

Exceptionally proficient on both acoustic and electric guitars, Hackett has a visionary six-string approach that's informed by the musical masters, stretching from the works of Baroque composer and keyboardist J.S. Bach right to the unorthodox six-string artistry of the late great Jeff Beck.

"It always comes back to Bach and Beck," Hackett affirms. "If it's first-inversion chords, and churchy changes, it's all Bach, while Beck informs my every note on electric guitar. Before players like him, guitars used to just go 'twang.' Then they learned to sustain and scream and impersonate a woman's voice and imitate brass instruments. I was fooled when I first heard the Stones doing 'Satisfaction,' as I thought it was a brass section or a trumpet. I had no idea at the time that it was a guitar! I realized at that moment, that was where the guitar was heading, that it was going to be impersonating all these things. Guitar was the synthesizer before the synthesizer."

The following five songs, all from Hackett's Genesis oeuvre, showcase some of his finest envelope-pushing moments on record. "I think we were very good for each other, and I think I pushed them as much as they pushed me," he says of his time with the group. "It wasn't always easy at times, and we struggled to keep a lid on some of the arguments, but Genesis at its best was absolutely mighty."

"HORIZONS"
FOXTROT (1972)

ROB MONK

"I was writing very, very slowly and noodling away on this thing for about a year. I had no idea that Genesis would use it, but I played it one day to

Hackett's one-off Zemaitis acoustic and his 1957 Gibson Les Paul goldtop.

the band, and Phil was the first one to say, 'I think we should use that, as it sounds like there ought to be applause after it.' It was surprising, as I was still the new boy with the band. I played it on a friend's borrowed Yamaha steel-string. Whenever I've played it in recent times, it's usually on a nylon-string guitar, which seems to suit it better.

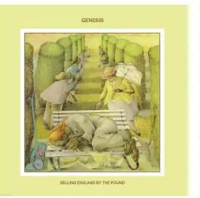
"It's a Bach variation in spirit. If you're really looking for where it came from, there's a reference to Bach's Cello Suite No. 1. While the *Foxtrot* album is pretty much a futuristic-sounding album, there are moments where it goes right back to that great keyboard player, Johann Sebastian Bach. No one's ever been quite that good since.

"It was done in one take, though I had to do four to get it right. The strings on the Yamaha are grouped very closely together on its narrow fretboard.

"The song's length was influenced by 'The Earle of Salisbury,' by English composer William Byrd, who was before Bach. I first heard John Renbourn do a version on his album *Sir John Alot of Merrie Englandes Musyk Thyng & Ye Grene Knyghte*. It was a great record that he did just prior to forming Pentangle with Bert Jansch. I loved the idea that the tune, written by a Tudor composer, was just the perfect little piece, at only a minute and half long, so I too deliberately wrote something to last a minute and a half. Therefore, it was able to slot into the Genesis canon without disturbing the waters too much, as an interlude to 'Supper's Ready,' which is an epic tune. We never did anything quite that long before or after. I'm proud of it as a little piece. It's written in an ancient style, and though not the work of a modern brain. It's the work of a brain impersonating the old masters."

"YOU KNOW IT AND CAN HUM IT. MY MOM TEARS UP EVERY TIME SHE HEARS IT"

"FIRTH OF FIFTH" *SELLING ENGLAND BY THE POUND* (1973)



"Tony came in with the initial idea for the tune. Peter liked the melody line and said it sounded very much like the blues, but to me it seemed more like gospel in a way, as the verse has a gospel feel to it. The song's strength is characterized by the instrumental work throughout it. It's the thing that people refer to as typically progressive, but at the time we didn't know that we were doing something that was going to be referred to as progressive.

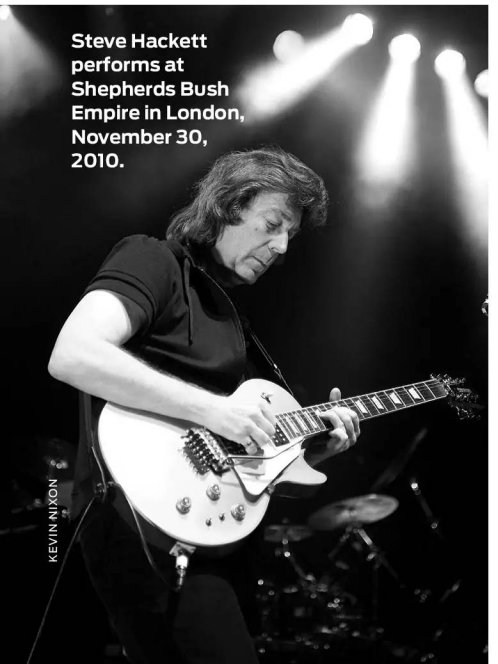
"I really like it a lot. Tony originally had the melody on piano, and then we tried it on flute, but I wanted to try it on guitar as I had just gotten hold of a certain combination of toys: an Echoplex and a Colorsound Tone Bender fuzz box, which was a copy of a Marshall Supa Fuzz. Along with my 1957 goldtop Les Paul, which went into a 1971 100-watt Hiwatt amp, the serendipity of those things coalesced into this perfect guitar solo for that song. It's probably the most well-known one in the Genesis canon — the go-to one.

"It was based a little bit on the work of the French minimalists, as the melody itself is very Erik Satie–esque. The way I interpreted it was to do it with bends, so it sounded weird, sustaining and unheard of. I got to do a three-and-half-minute guitar solo in the middle of another tune, which itself came out to something like 10 minutes. It's a substantial part of the song, and I think it's a beautiful piece of music. And for me it's all about the guitar solo.

"I'd like to think that I'm sufficiently detached to say that's where the song soars and is at its best. It's a memorable and very melodic solo, and it's there in the pantheon. You know it and can hum it, and my mom likes it so much she tears up every time she hears it. It showcases the band using rock instruments but sounding at their most symphonic. 'A rock group impersonating an orchestra' comes very close to describing it. One of Genesis's best."

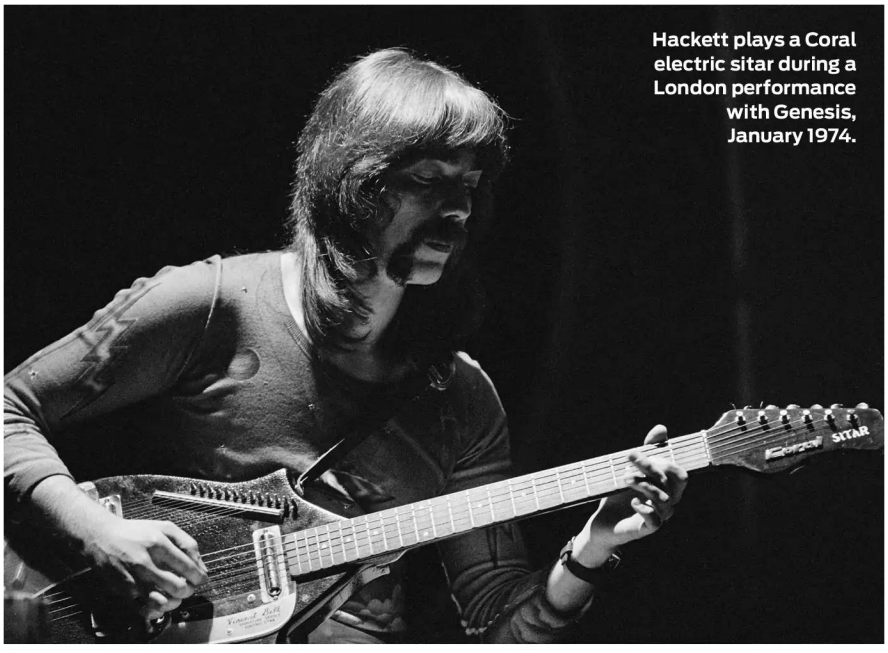
"HERE COMES THE SUPERNATURAL ANAESTHETIST" *THE LAMB LIES DOWN ON BROADWAY* (1974)

"This song really came together out of Mike and I working together. He was playing these chordal parts, and I wrote a lead line over the top of them. It's got this very haunting rhythm to it, but it's also very melodic and quirky and fits the album perfectly. We were trying to be very different from everything we'd done before, and though there were moments when we succeeded, at other times there are moments on the album where I feel it wanders off the plot, as double albums tend to do.



Steve Hackett performs at Shepherds Bush Empire in London, November 30, 2010.

KEVIN NIXON



Hackett plays a Coral electric sitar during a London performance with Genesis, January 1974.

"Phil had started experimenting with recording his voice at half speed, so that when you played it back you had this kind of Mickey Mouse–sounding voice. It was a trick he used more and more after he became the lead singer of Genesis. You've got to remember this was crafted during the era of Peter Gabriel as lead singer, with Phil doing backup. Here you got a glimpse at some of those vocal textures that Phil would employ later when he could do it himself. He was a guy full of ideas and obviously full of a lot of suppressed ideas, and with very clever rhythmic ideas. Sometimes he'd be able to take a melody and change the whole feel by changing the rhythm of it. I think maybe if he had gained a little more confidence in an album or two's time, he probably would've taken that track and made it swing a little bit more. It does something that's more angular and stranger.

"I again used my Gibson Les Paul, an H&H transistor amp and the Tone Bender fuzz box. I was also using two Leslie cabinets. Because this was before chorus and pitch shift had been invented, I'd put my guitar through the Leslie to give it a chimey sound. I had one track that was Leslie-d and one that went straight. With the Les Paul not being a very bright-sounding guitar, I had to turn up the treble quite a bit or give it some kind of boost in that department, but because it was a very gutsy guitar, it sounded very smooth."

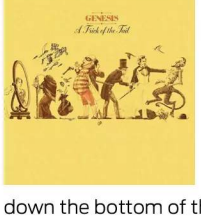
"IT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING CHOPIN MIGHT HAVE WRITTEN. IT'S MY PERSONAL BEST"

"IT"
THE LAMB LIES DOWN ON BROADWAY (1974)

"Mike had this Shergold electric 12-string and liked to put it in strange tunings. I'm not sure exactly what tuning he had for this, but the main thrust of it came from a guitar-strumming idea and from that we all added things to it. There's quite a lot of lead guitar work, which I wrote and which was also doubled on keyboard. It's got a quirky lyric from Peter too, and I felt we were sounding a little bit like what other bands were doing with the 12-string at the time — a bit like the Byrds — while the guitars and synth together were sounding a bit like Yes.

"The tune came together very much live and was at its strongest in the live setting, where Peter would depict a Puerto Rican punk with a leather jacket with makeup on. There was also this very lifelike dummy that was brought on for 'It' during the live performance. And because there were strobes on either side of the stage, you couldn't tell which was the real Peter Gabriel and which was the very lifelike dummy, as this thing looked uncannily alive even at close quarters. I think the live presentation of 'It' was all-important to making this thing work, especially as it was the tour de force that closed the album."

"RIPPLES"
A TRICK OF THE TAIL (1976)



"It was typical of Genesis to use more than one 12-string guitar. Mike and I both had acoustic Zemaitis 12-string guitars. As he was playing right down the bottom of the neck and getting all those open-string sounds, I decided to do something else a whole octave higher up the fretboard, as I wanted to sweeten it and make it very chocolate box.

"You'll be forgiven for thinking that my part was recorded at half speed; it was actually done in real time. When we got to the middle section, it just kept paddling around a few changes, so I thought it needed something to save the day.

"I was working with a piece of kit called the EMS Synthi Hi-Fli. It had the ability to cut off the front of the note, a bit like fading it in, so it sounded like you were playing backward. It also had a compressor that made the notes sustain for a very long time and kept the same dynamic, and with a very thin kind of distortion. I never really found any other piece of kit that really distorted quite like that thing.

"So I did a forward guitar solo that attempted to sound like a backward guitar solo, and then we put a pre-echo on it. And because this is preempted by genuine backward stuff, you get this highly confusing combination of what's forward and what's backward. I also wanted to come up with a melody that would be memorable. People always mention 'Firth of Fifth' as my best guitar melody, but actually I'm very fond of this one because of the sort of poignant nature of the way the guitar functions on it. It doesn't really sound much like a guitar at all; it sounds more like something that Chopin might have written for a string section. It's my personal best.

"It's a brilliant little tune. The sound is very subtle, unique and very atmospheric, and very Genesis, and very much what we got into on the subsequent album, *Wind & Wuthering*, which followed, and which had that sort of poignant thing going on too. I think Mike picked up on what I was trying to do at the time, writing things that could be part of very romantic film scores. I think it's one of Genesis's best little tunes, and it's got the best of what 12-strings can do and the best of what an electric guitar can do."

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

LEO QUAN
BADASS

SCAN ME

LEGENDARY WRAPAROUND BRIDGE & FINE TUNER TAILPIECE

BACK & BADDER THAN EVER!

Copyright © 2023 Allparts Music.

This 1962 Gibson ES-355TDSV is a beautiful example. Incidentally, the TDSV designation in the name stands for "Thinline," "Dual" (cutaway), "Stereo" and "Varitone."

Top-Shelf Semi

From its bling to its stereo electronics, **Gibson's ES-355** launched the semihollow format to swank new heights.

ALTHOUGH IT WAS Gibson's first major endorsement-led electric guitar, the Les Paul model failed to set the market on fire during its initial run, from 1952 to '60. But the thinline semi-hollowbody ES-335 that joined the company's lineup in 1958 was much closer to an overnight success. The seminal semihollow design immediately proved to be one of the world's most versatile electric guitars, and it has retained that reputation ever since. And just as Gibson had extended the Les Paul range in 1953 with the Custom model, a.k.a. Black Beauty, the company added to the ES lineup in late 1958 with the ES-355, the top model of the range.

The step up to the ES-355 brought with it changes to the guitar's electronics — including stereo wiring and a six-position Varitone switch — as well as cosmetics. Like the Les Paul Custom, the 355 served up the bling, adding ebony, gold hardware and large fret-marker blocks, rather than the dot inlays of the ES-335 model. Just as the undeniably classy Custom had smartened the look of the base Les Paul model with its dinner-jacket attire and gold hardware, the standard Cherry finish of the debutante ES-355 brought more color to the palette and helped the rest of its adornments really pop. Framed by seven-ply body binding, the deep-red translucent finish provided a stunning background for the gold-plated hardware, completing a package that screamed "top shelf" from any angle. Sunburst and Natural were introduced as standard finish options in 1960, but for most players, the Cherry finish — which on many examples has faded to a watermelon red — will always be the classic look.

FANCY... BUT FUSSY

The ES-355's high-end appointments carried on right up the neck, where pearloid-block position markers contrasted with the ebony fingerboard, and to the headstock's split-diamond inlay. Elaborate five-ply binding encircled the enlarged headstock, which was further upgraded with gold Grover Rotomatic tuners as standard and a truss-rod cover engraved (in most instances) with "Stereo."

In other regards, the ES-355 had the same construction as the ES-335, which included a body made from laminated maple, a maple center block to help impede feedback and improve sustain and clarity, and a glued-in

PHOTOS BY TUCKER BEIRNE, GUITAR COURTESY OF SCRUFFS VINTAGE GUITARS

The six-position Varitone provided one bypass setting and five levels of notch filtering for a wide range of preset EQ voicings.

BY DAVE HUNTER

The gold hardware loses its luster with time and wear.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Thinline symmetrical double-cutaway body made from laminated maple with solid-maple center block
- Seven-ply body binding, five-ply headstock binding
- Glued-in mahogany neck, 24.75" scale length
- Ebony fretboard with pearloid block inlays
- Two humbucking pickups (one PAF, one Patent Number on this example)
- Six-position Varitone switch and stereo output jack

mahogany neck. The use of an ebony fretboard on the ES-355, however, rather than the rosewood of the ES-335 and ES-345, enhanced the guitar's treble response and gave a little more bite and clarity to the overall tone. It's a brightness booster that some players don't feel this model needs, which is why many have favored the standard-issue ES-335 over the years.

But a big part of that love for the down-market sibling stems from the ES-355's overly complex electronics, starting with its stereo wiring. Placing the three-way pickup toggle in the front or back position selects the bridge (lead) and neck (rhythm) pickups individually but sends them to different "hot" terminals on the stereo (TRS) output jack. With the switch in the middle position, however, both pickups are sent to their respective outputs simultaneously. Either way, the result requires a special Y cable to connect the guitar's output either to two separate amps or two channels of the same amp (or, ideally in Gibson's view, one of their own stereo amps, such as the GA-79RVT). The ES-355 could also be special-ordered in mono, but most were made with the stereo feature, which a lot of guitarists avoided or converted to mono for ease of use. Bear in mind that Gibson reversed the polarity of the pickups in vintage stereo ES-355s, arguably to enhance the spread of the stereo effect when both were used together. Unless you're a fan of the out-of-phase Peter Green tone, that's another modification to factor in.

In its first three years of existence, the ES-355 came standard with a Bigsby vibrato (very few were made with no Bigsby and a stopbar tailpiece). For 1961–'62, the Bigsby was replaced with the arguably cumbersome sideways vibrola — as seen on our 1962 example featured in this issue — which, in turn, was replaced with a long vibrola with lyre cover plate in 1963. Given the potential persnicketiness of any of these vibrato units, players have also sometimes paid a premium for one of the relatively few factory-hardtail vintage ES-355s made in the early years.

LUXE FOR LESS

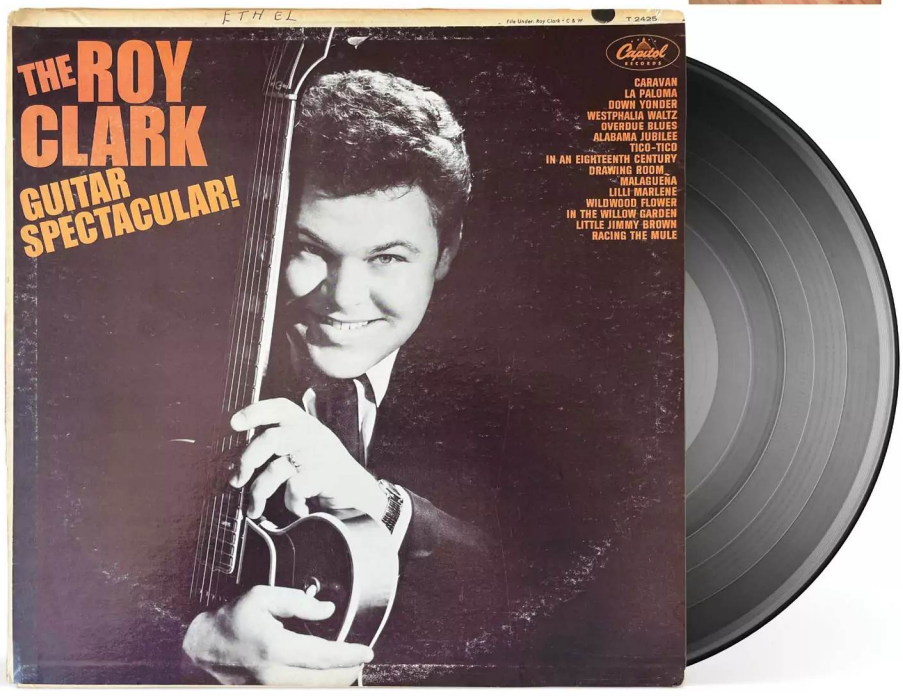
The result of all this is that good ES-355s from the late '50s and early '60s have often sold for considerably less than comparable ES-335s, despite their elevated cosmetics. Those who dig the model for what it is, though, have often gotten great use out of its special features, and many players have found a lot to love in the Varitone settings, too. The ES-355 has appealed to a wide range of notable guitarists over the years, including B.B. King, Chuck Berry, Keith Richards, Alex Lifeson, Otis Rush, Noel Gallagher, Johnny Marr, Tad Kubler from the Hold Steady and Ray Benson from Asleep at the Wheel. All have made hay out of the model's broad sonic palette. Though if you're mainly drawn to a vintage ES-355 for its looks, it's reason enough to scratch that itch.

THOSE WHO DIG THE MODEL FOR WHAT IT IS HAVE OFTEN GOTTEN GREAT USE OUT OF ITS SPECIAL FEATURES

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Image Shredder

With elegance and speed, **Roy Clark** showed he was more than a *Hee Haw* sidekick.



ONCE UPON A time, as I watched Roy Clark performing "Malagueña" on TV, I thought to myself, Sheesh! This guy is sweating buckets. Is sweating a part of his act? Years later, I learned that "that guy from *Hee Haw,*" as I knew Roy, was a great multi-instrumentalist. He even made a guitar duet record with Joe Pass. So when I found *Guitar Spectacular*, I bought it. As it turns out, it's a great place to start appreciating Roy Clark for the artist he could be.

I'm always pleased to re-evaluate an artist who I consider "commercial." For example, many people think of Jerry Reed as Cledus Snow in *Smokey and the Bandit*, but Mr. Reed was actually one of the great guitar composers of the 20th century. Similarly, Roy Clark was more then a hokey main player on *Hee Haw*, as *Guitar Spectacular* readily proves.

Roy's fourth record as a solo artist, *Guitar Spectacular* was released on Capitol Records in 1965, when he was 32. It's my favorite of his albums (with all due respect to 1963's *The Lightning Fingers of Roy Clark*), and I learned many songs from it that I still play today.

ROY CLARK WAS MORE THEN A HOKEY MAIN PLAYER ON *HEE HAW*, AS *GUITAR SPECTACULAR* READILY PROVES

Side one opens with "Caravan," which employs an infectious jungle drumbeat before swinging hard in the B section. Roy rips over this entire track. When I play "Caravan," I use the Chet & Les two-beat on the A section and always swing the B section, Roy Clark style. Roy had a tremendous right hand and his 64th notes are clean and seemingly effortless. He also plays jaw-dropping muted 128th notes on "Caravan" as a percussive statement. I've never heard anything like it. The south-of-the-border feel that follows on "La Paloma" sounds more manufactured than inspired, but Roy injects life with grace notes and fire. "Down Yonder" has a New Orleans jazz feel, with Roy playing lead lines reminiscent of Joe Maphis. Ripping over the dominant-7th changes, he owns it. "Westphalia" is up next, with a hard waltz feel. I always appreciate records from this era, where a waltz was mandatory and a part of the instrumental repertoire. Roy testifies with authority on the smokey "Overdue Blues," and I can't help imagining his clean hollowbody electric sound — I'm guessing a Gibson Byrdland through a clean-sounding Fender Twin — replaced by a Telecaster through a cranked Fender Deluxe. I bet it would sound like Danny Gatton. "Alabama Jubilee" closes the side with an uptempo toe-tapper showcasing more of Roy's flash guitar.

"Tico Tico" opens side two and is another arrangement I've adopted. The technical gymnastics of Roy's breakneck playing transcend the somewhat corny backing track. "In an Eighteenth Century Drawing Room" begins with solo classical guitar before going into a happy swing rendition. The aforementioned "Malagueña" is included as a solo guitar piece, and while it's not my favorite, it was apparently a people pleaser and a show stopper when performed live. "Lilli Marlene" follows as a break in the action, where Roy plays the melody with feeling and the phrasing of a master craftsman. A medley that includes "Wildwood Flower" serves as a flatpicking showcase and leads to the album closer, "Racing the Mule." Lest anyone forget Roy can shred, "Racing the Mule" is a potent reminder. His virtuosity can't be denied.

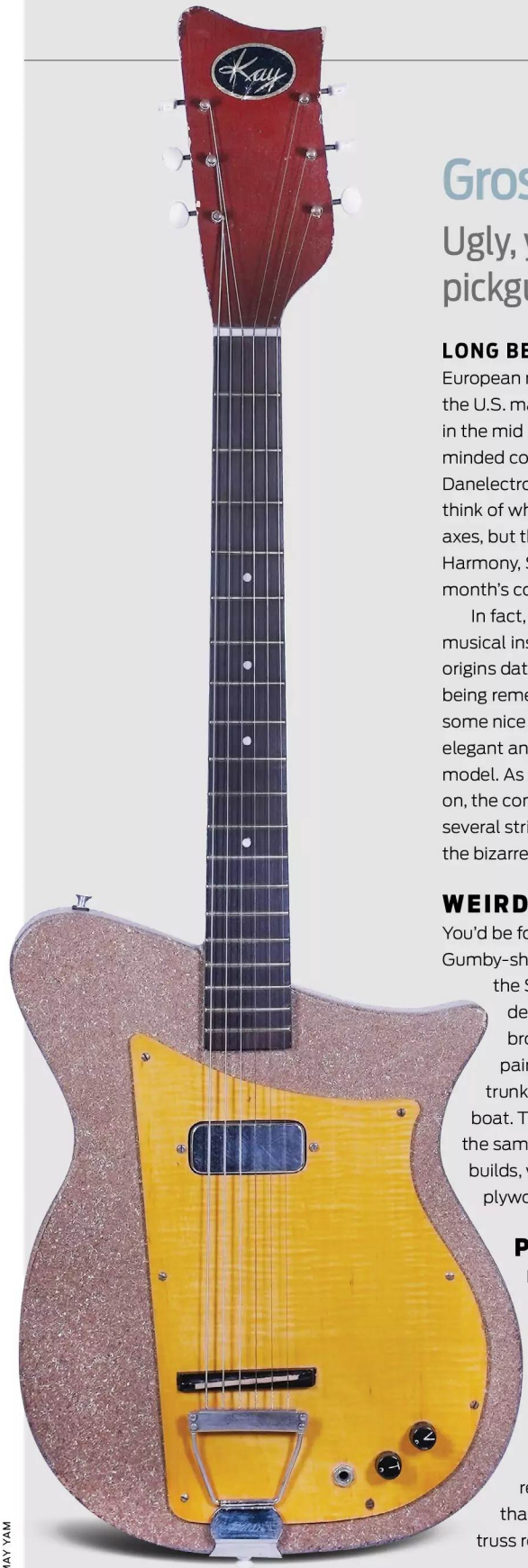
Although I love this LP, it mght be pushing it for some listeners. It's very commercial and at times borders on cheesy. And yet, I learned many significant arrangements and techniques from it, and if Roy Clark broke out in a sweat making *Guitar Spectacular*, it's totally fine by me. I would be sweating too. Leo Fender once said, "Roy Clark — he plays the guitar the way a guitar should be played." I agree. Roy was one helluva guitar player.

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

BY TERRY CARLETON

Gross Domestic Product

Ugly, yes. But with its Masonite body and plywood pickguard, this Kay Solo King is a U.S.-made marvel.



LONG BEFORE JAPANESE and European musical instrument makers flooded the U.S. market with cheap starter guitars in the mid 1960s, we had our own budget-minded companies right here in the states. Danelectro is the guitar maker most people think of when it comes to cheap-and-cheerful axes, but there were many others, including Harmony, Supro and — the subject of this month's column — Kay.

In fact, Kay was a very well-established musical instrument manufacturer, with origins dating back to the 1930s. Despite being remembered for budget axes, Kay built some nice guitars in its early years, like the elegant and sought-after Barney Kessel model. As the rock and roll craze caught on, the company had the foresight to offer several stripped-down beginner guitars, like the bizarre 1958 Solo King model shown here.

WEIRDO FACTOR

You'd be forgiven for looking past the huge Gumby-shaped headstock and focusing on the Solo King's body shape. It's definitely weird. Even stranger is the brown Zolotone finish: Zolotone is the paint you'd typically use to line the trunk of a car or the interior of a fishing boat. The body, incidentally, is Masonite, the same material Danelectro used on its builds, while the pickguard is simply plywood stained a cheesy orange.

PLAYABILITY & SOUND

Remarkably, the Solo King actually plays well and sounds pretty good. The 19-fret maple set neck is quite wide, more like a Gretsch acoustic 12-string, and the rosewood fretboard is completely flat. That chunky build is undoubtedly why the neck has remained straight and true for more than 65 years despite the absence of a truss rod. As if to underscore the Solo King's spare utilitarian vibe, the body has one single-coil pickup, a volume knob, a tone knob and a floating non-adjustable bridge. Played clean, it has a tone almost like that of an acoustic guitar. With overdrive, this thing gets dark and dirty. It's not very articulate, but if you like chunky and muddy (could be the name of a new ice cream flavor) then this guitar could be for you. And despite its construction, the Solo King is really light.

VALUE

The Solo King had an MSRP of $75 in Kay's 1958 catalog. Today you can pick one up for anywhere between $750 and $1,500, depending on its condition.

WHY IT RULES

From its striking looks to its cool tones, the Solo King is unlike any other guitar. More than that, it's an American-made guitar from the 1950s that is still quite affordable.

Thanks to Dinette Guitars for helping me procure this freaky piece of Americana.

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com. Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it!

MAY YAM

INTERMISSION

Soundtrack composer and former Yes guitarist **Trevor Rabin** cuts his first song-oriented solo album in 34 years. What took so long? "The time," he says, "just disappeared."

BY GARY GRAFF

"I don't think there was any kind of masterplan in the beginning, or anything close to it," Trevor Rabin says, summarizing a music career that's taken him from classroom music stands to Hollywood movie studios — and many points in between. "It all just kind of happened. I think everything took different avenues once it got going."

Rest assured, the South African–born guitarist, composer, bandleader and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer (with Yes) has traveled a great many paths while playing music for almost all of his 69 years. His latest effort, *Rio* (Inside Out Music), is his first new song-oriented solo album in 34 years.

The son of overachieving artistic parents — dad Godfrey was an attorney, conductor and lead violinist in the Johannesburg Philharmonic; mom Joy a painter, ballerina, actress and classical pianist — Rabin says he grew up as a prodigy who "could read music before I could read English." Piano lessons at age five led to classical studies as a youth, as well as thoughts of becoming a conductor. That was well before the rock world beckoned with groups such as Rabbitt, Manfred Mann's Earth Band and nearly Asia, after which he took Yes to the top of the charts with "Owner of a Lonely Heart" 40 years ago. Then in the mid '90s, partly thanks to a chance meeting with actor Steven Seagal, Rabin entered the scoring world and never looked back. His extensive resume in film and television includes 13 Jerry Bruckheimer movies and projects such as *Con Air*, *Armageddon*, *Remember the Titans* and *National Treasure*.

Rabin's scores have also accompanied presidential speeches and the Mission: Space attraction at Disney's Epcot park. He even became a basketball fan after being commissioned to write music for National Basketball Association and NCAA March Madness broadcasts.

Rabin did find himself on the rock and roll road again with fellow Yes alumni Jon Anderson and Rick Wakeman after the band's Rock Hall induction in 2017, but he acknowledges that more than 25 years of scoring (lucrative, of course) subsumed that other vital part of his musical makeup. "Time just kind of slipped by, you know?" he says from Los Angeles, where he moved during the early '80s when Geffen Records was courting him to be part of the then-gestating Asia, a plan that ultimately, he says, "just wasn't right." "It seems like yesterday I started doing film scores, and after doing 50-odd movies and hundreds of TV things and sports themes and what have you, the time just disappeared. It passed me by."

Rabin did release an instrumental album in 2012 called *Jacaranda*, but his last vocal/song project was *Can't Look Away*, in 1989, which came in the midst of a 13-year run with Yes that included four studio albums and the short-lived Union octet.

HRISTO SHINDOV

Trevor Rabin with his longtime main guitar, a 1962 Fender Stratocaster with rosewood fretboard, a Seymour Duncan Hot Rails (bridge), a Bill Lawrence L250 (middle) and a Seymour Duncan Hot Stack (neck).

Not long after that, Rabin says, "I had this urge to sing and play some pretty much prog-rock type of things. I started thinking about what I'm gonna do and started putting it together in bits and pieces as time went by." The pandemic — and the addition of a new Telecaster with a B-Bender — instilled an urgency within him to get on with it.

"Last year I decided, Okay, I've got to stop screwing around and actually do it," Rabin says with a laugh. "So I started pushing everything aside. I didn't take on any films; I did a *National Treasure: Edge of History* series for Disney+, and once that was done I really put everything aside and concentrated on the album.

"The idea," he continues, "was to visit different genres but make sure it still sounds like a cohesive, coherent thing from one guy, one entity. It happened pretty quickly once I got to work on it, actually. I had ideas from quite some time ago which I hadn't really implemented or done — lyrical ideas I didn't have any music for, or vice versa — and it all just started to tie together and worked out."

"THE IDEA WAS TO VISIT DIFFERENT GENRES BUT MAKE SURE IT STILL SOUNDS LIKE A COHESIVE, COHERENT THING FROM ONE GUY"

The 10-track *Rio* is largely a one-man affair. *Jacaranda* contributors Lou Molino and Vinnie Calaiuta both played drums, while Rabin's son Ryan assisted with percussive arrangements, and Dante Marchi and Liz Constantine added backing vocals on two songs. And even though he, like so many others, had been locked down and away from other musicians, Rabin says he was still well-tuned from seven years of playing in ARW with Anderson and Wakeman.

"Two hundred shows later, my chops were pretty moving," he says, while acknowledging that his immersion in the scoring world kept ARW from releasing more than one original song, "Fragile" (a demo of which is included on a limited deluxe edition of *Rio*). "After the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame thing, we talked and said, 'Let's do some shows!'" Rabin recalls, "but I had film stuff on the burner, so I figured we'd do five, six shows and it'd be a lot of fun. And then look what happened! And it was great. I didn't think it would turn out as well as it did.

"The one thing we never did, which was talked about so much, was a record, but we ended up on the road the whole time, which was our choice, prompted heavily by management and promoters. There were a couple ideas here, but nothing really serious, except for 'Fragile,' which is something I'd had for a long time."

Although guitar has been a primary tool for his scoring, Rabin was happy to apply it to the song format for *Rio*, where he primarily used his heavily modified 1962 Fender Stratocaster with a rosewood fretboard, an Alvarez and the B-Bender Tele. "Oh, man, it was like honey," he says with a wide smile. "Obviously, I'd been playing a lot of guitar on the scores, but nothing like doing a record or playing live, picking up the guitar and sticking it in there and really going. So I was a kid in the candy store. It was great." And, he adds, the scoring had given that kid an expanded vocabulary for this group of songs.

Rabin performs onstage with Chris Squire in Yes, 1984.

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS (FAR LEFT); PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

"I'd been playing a lot of guitar on the scores, but nothing like doing a record or playing live," Rabin says.

HRISTO SHINDOV

"I did change my whole approach," Rabin notes. "I wanted to use the guitar to do solos, obviously, but I didn't want it to be like the metal stuff, where they stand on the podium and shred. I always wanted to arrange things and have sounds on there that were necessary, not some kind of statement. I think the movies led the guitar to moving in that direction even more."

"LAST YEAR I DECIDED I'VE GOT TO STOP SCREWING AROUND AND ACTUALLY DO IT"

On *Rio* you can hear Rabin's pent-up guitar hero come out, particularly on the track "Thandi" (the name of an illegally poached rhinoceros), as he unleashes a soundscape that knits together elements of prog and jazz fusion and fuzz-box sound effects, all through a 100-watt Marshall stack.

"That's probably the song I enjoyed playing the most," Rabin says, smiling again. "I remember my wife coming home, saying, 'I can hear it at the bottom of the street!'"

"Getting the sounds for the different parts of that song was a real blast," he continues. "I did the solos about six times each, just 'cause I was enjoying playing them. I didn't think, Which one shall I use? It was, I want to do that again! I thoroughly enjoyed just playing it."

Rabin exercises his rock chops throughout *Rio*, particularly on the opening "Big Mistakes" and "Push," while applying his orchestral sensibilities to tracks such as "Oklahoma," an elegy to the 1995 domestic terrorist attack in Oklahoma City. On "Paradise" and "Goodbye," meanwhile, he reveals a country facility that may surprise some of his audience.

"I love great country players," Rabin says, noting Vince Gill and Jerry Douglas's Dobro work, in particular. "There's just a load of great players. But when I got the B-Bender, I fell in love with it and learned how to find a way I can bend so it's smooth and doesn't sound just like a B-Bender but sounds like the strings are being bent by fingers — that's where that song 'Goodbye' came from, with a lot of the chicken pickin'. That was great to play."

Rabin says a tour in support of *Rio* "is certainly gonna be on the cards," but there are no concrete plans yet. And while the scoring world will surely beckon again, he's also confident that it won't be another 34 years before we get another song album from him.

"I've actually already started," Rabin says, indicating that he's "halfway through a long song" that will likely be to the liking of the substantial Yes contingent in his audience. "When I was with Yes, after the success of *90215* — which were reasonably short songs — the record company started asking for long songs, 'cause that's just the history of Yes. I've got nothing against that, so there may be more of that on the next one."

50 YEARS OF KISS

THE END OF THE ROAD

As **Kiss** bring their 50-year reign to a close, we say goodbye to a rock and roll dynasty.

FIFTY YEARS AGO, four New York City punks set the music world on fire with their swaggering brand of rock and roll and ghoulish costumes. It was a minor victory, seeing as the greater number of music listeners were simply shaking their heads in wonder at this band of cartoonish costumed wags.

It took time, but within a few years, the tide began to turn — first in cities like Detroit, where teen fans made "Rock and Roll All Nite" a party anthem, and then in towns and metropolises throughout the country and, eventually, the world. Before then, Kiss had simply been a quartet: guitarist Paul Stanley, lead guitarist Ace Frehley, bassist Gene Simmons and drummer Peter Criss. Afterward, they were an institution, cutting 20 studio albums and seven live discs, and revolutionizing the industry with their elaborate stage sets and endlessly inventive merchandising.

But don't let the size of the Kiss juggernaut obscure the fact that they were one of the most influential groups to emerge from that great decade. Don't believe it? Just ask countless guitarists who grew up on the band in their greatest era, the 1970s.

And now it's rolling to a close. On December 2, Kiss will bring down the curtain on their 50-year reign as rock and roll's biggest live act. To mark the occasion, we reconnected with Paul, Gene, Ace and Peter, and conferred with former Kiss guitarist Bruce Kulick, current guitarist Tommy Thayer and a host of the group's friends for insights into Kiss's influence on guitar rock — and more significantly, Paul's enduring influence as a guitarist on some of rock's most inspiring players.

(from left) Tommy Thayer, Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley and Eric Singer.

JEN ROSENSTEIN

50 YEARS OF KISS

GUITAR STAR

Take away the makeup and stage theatrics, and you start to see **Paul Stanley** for what he really is: a consummate rhythm guitarist. In this *Guitar Player* exclusive, he takes us on a tour of his six-string life, from his youth to the studio and the world's stages.

BY KEN SHARP

"WE WANTED TO be a band that had heavy guitars but also songs with strong melodies and choruses. That's the school I grew up in," Paul Stanley says, reflecting on the birth of Kiss, the group he co-founded some 50 years ago. "It was coming more from the Brill Building kind of writers than head-banging. The idea was to combine some of the old Tin Pan Alley sensibilities with the Beatles' style of songwriting and make it more guitar-driven, like Led Zeppelin, or the Rolling Stones and the Who. Interestingly, most of it was about rhythm guitar, which is the foundation of everything. Without it, everything falls apart."

From humble roots in Queens, New York, through equal measures of talent, ambition, hard work and self-belief, Paul Stanley willed himself into becoming a rock star. His Kiss persona is the Starchild after all, and he's been championed as one of rock's greatest frontmen. In concert, he's part game-show host, part gospel preacher, espousing the life-affirming spirit of anthemic, fist-waving rock and roll thunder. More than most guitarists, Stanley embraces his vital role as a rhythm player. Think of him as the bastard child of Keith Richards' raucous riffery, the arena-rock power-chord majesty of Pete Townshend and the boogie-rock splendor of Humble Pie's Steve Marriott.

And like all three of those guitarists, Stanley has taken to the task with a mixture of swagger and attitude. His rowdy rhythms and arena-ready riffs on Kiss classics like "Strutter," "Got to Choose," "C'mon and Love Me," "Rock and Roll All Nite" and countless others were the sonic fuel that helped transport four struggling New York City musicians into superstardom and, decades later, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Throughout Kiss's storied career, both on record and in concert, lead guitarists Ace Frehley, Vinnie Vincent, Mark St. John, Bruce Kulick and Tommy Thayer have done the heavy lifting as fleet-fingered

JEN ROSENSTEIN
PAUL STANLEY

TOP LEFT: Paul Stanley holds a Gibson Flying V as Kiss meet backstage with Elton John at the Great Western Forum, Long Beach, California, February 1976. (from left) Ace Frehley, Peter Criss, John, Gene Simmons and Stanley.

ABOVE LEFT: Stanley plays his Gibson Midnight Special at the Great Western Forum, 1974.

ABOVE RIGHT: Playing his signature Ibanez PS10 circa 1978.

six-string soloists. But on the rare occasion when Stanley steps up to peel off a guitar solo, it's always special, memorable and instantly hummable. Neither a flashy soloist nor a speed merchant, Stanley makes each note count. He's a distinctive stylist plucked from the George Harrison school of guitar playing, who hunkers down and takes the time to meticulously craft picture perfect guitar solos that tell a story within a song. When Stanley chooses to lay down a solo, whether it's the exquisite Kossoff-flavored slow-hand finery on "Hold Me, Touch Me," the searing metallic attack on "I Stole Your Love" or the epic David Gilmour–esque sonic flights of atmospheric fancy on "A World Without Heroes," it's always melodically inventive and in service to the song.

For much of the band's '70s heyday, his arsenal of axes leaned heavily on Gibson guitars, including the L6-S Midnight Special, Flying V, Firebird, Explorer and EDS-1275 double-neck. That all changed in the late '70s with the introduction of Stanley's first signature guitar, the Ibanez PS10, which became his go-to six-string. Through the decades, his onstage rigs included models from a wide range of brands, including Hamer, B.C. Rich, Steinberger and, of course, Gibson. Stanley later aligned with Washburn and Silvertone on the creation of new signature models, but he is now back in the fold with Ibanez and involved in the development and design of his own line.

Now, as Kiss wind down their career and begin the final U.S. leg of their End of the Road, Stanley graciously sat down with *Guitar Player* for a talk about his guitar journey — how it all began, and the sights and sounds from along the way. Sit back and enjoy his most in-depth and comprehensive conversation about all things guitar.

What's your earliest memory of seeing a guitar?

Probably Eddie Cochran or Elvis. And with that you get Carl Perkins and everyone else from that era who fits the model — the guitar player as a frontman. But I'd go with Eddie Cochran and Elvis.

What made you want to play guitar?

The guitar was the messenger of rock and roll — the primary instrument. Certainly, you've got Little Richard with a piano, but the guitar was always the instrument of rock and roll. People think about the guitar solos and lead playing, but it was really the

ARMANDO GALLO/GETTY IMAGES (ELTON); MARK SULLIVAN/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES (1975)

strumming — that was the call to arms. That's usually what you heard first.

What was your first guitar, and how did you come to own it?

I bugged my parents, and for my 13th birthday I figured that I'd finally got them to get me an electric guitar. And as it turned out, they got me a really crappy used nylon-string guitar. I was heartbroken, because nobody that I had seen on American Bandstand or in [*rock and roll concert promoter*] Alan Freed's shows, or rock and roll movies, like *The Girl Can't Help It* — nobody was playing an acoustic nylon-string guitar.

> "I ALSO SAW LESLIE WEST. LESLIE, GOD LOVE HIM. HE LOOKED LIKE JIMI HENDRIX IF JIMI HENDRIX WEIGHED 400 POUNDS"

So I looked at it and put it under the bed and didn't pull it out for quite a while. But as I would eventually learn, to play guitar with some sort of depth and understanding, you really should start out playing an acoustic guitar. I think that an acoustic guitar is so much less forgiving, and it also requires nuances that the electric guitar doesn't — or it does so in a different way. So at the end of the day, I think I was fortunate that I started out with an acoustic guitar.

How long did you play acoustic before you got your first electric?

Probably a year or so, if not more. My parents, God love them, they thought love meant denying your kids certain things, to toughen them up. So my first electric guitar I bought myself, and it was a two-pickup and pretty much a three-quarter-sized Vox copy of a Strat. It was a salmon color that Fender also used, one of their classic DuPont-type colors.

Where did you buy that guitar?

Back then, 48th Street was the holy land for guitars and amps. I used to do an almost weekly pilgrimage down there. I'd take a bus and a subway down to maybe 50th Street and then walk over there and go into all the guitar stores. It was very different then. Now you go in and they want you to play the instruments, much like bookstores. If you went into a bookstore back then and pulled out a book, they'd say, "You're going to buy that?" and it was very much the same with musical instruments. They were basically behind glass, and if you wanted to try something, you had to show them the money. Their first question was, "Are you buying today?" And if you said yes, they'd say, "Let me see the money."

So I wound up buying my first guitar on 48th Street, but not at Manny's. Manny's was like the premier instrument store, with drums, guitars and woodwinds — everything. I would just go down there and drool and wait for rock stars to come in so I could see the people I'd seen on television. I saw Hilton Valentine, who was the guitar player from the Animals. I also saw Leslie West. Leslie, God love him — he looked like Jimi Hendrix if Jimi Hendrix weighed 400 pounds. So it was exciting for me, and I made it a weekly trip.

What gear did you have circa 1967–'68?

I could only afford one guitar at a time, so at that point I had an SG Les Paul that cost me $120 at a pawn shop right near Tompkins Square Park in New York City. There used to be a pawn shop there, and my mom had hawked a diamond ring, which was wonderful, and got me a Fender Twin Reverb. I had no pedals or anything like that. The people who I was most enamored with and the bands that I saw at the Fillmore East were plugged into amplifiers. Hendrix had pedals, as did some other guitar players, but for the most part your sound came from a great guitar and

TRIBUTE

JOE PERRY

In the '70s, Kiss and Aerosmith were hard rock's reigning champions. Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry wasn't just a fan — he also appeared on Gene Simmons' 1978 solo album and in 2003 would be the first musician to ever jam with Kiss onstage at two shows on the Kiss/Aerosmith co-headlining tour.

"I remember hearing their album for the first time at [*Boston DJ*] Maxanne Sartori's apartment — her boyfriend at the time was Billy Squier. I really liked it. 'Strutter' just struck me as a really cool song, and almost any kid can pick up a guitar and learn that pretty quick, which to me is a sign of a really good rock and roll song.

"I look at Paul as a frontman who plays great guitar and great riffs. He plays exactly what needs to be played. Paul has a swagger, and the guitar is just part of his body. I can relate to that, because I feel the same way. It becomes an extension of your body and you move with the music. And he's got a fucking lot of moves. He plays it over his head, between his legs, swinging it around. And he makes it all work.

"We were out on the road with Kiss in 2003 and they asked me to come up and play with them, and I was like, 'Hell yeah!' I got to jam with them on 'Strutter' at two shows [*Oklahoma City and Los Angeles*]. I said the only way I was gonna do it was if I could wear the platform boots. Paul loaned me a pair of his. They've been wearing those boots for years and years, but man, it's a bitch. [*laughs*]"

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY (OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT); MICHAEL ZITO/WIREIMAGE (PERRY)

The original Kiss lineup is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, April 10, 2014.

BETTER CALL PAUL

Six current and former Kiss members explain what makes Paul Stanley the go-to guy for rhythm and lead guitar.

INTERVIEWS BY KEN SHARP

GENE SIMMONS

Paul Stanley's partner and musical foil since they teamed up in the pre-Kiss group Wicked Lester in 1971, bassist Gene Simmons knows better than anyone what Stanley brings to Kiss's music.

When we first started the band in 1972, there was this sense that Paul and Ace would complement each other and try not to play in the same chord range. The result would be this big guitar sound with different voicings of the same chord. But clearly, a lot of that came from Paul, who is not given the respect and recognition he deserves.

Paul has never just been a rhythm player. He has also been mighty handy on lead guitar. That's Paul doing lead guitar duties on "A World Without Heroes." That's Paul playing the harmony on the "Detroit Rock City" solo. That's Paul at the beginning of "C'mon & Love Me," and it was Paul who came up with the chordal intro on my song "Deuce." Without those chords opening the song, it simply wouldn't have the same impact. "Deuce" without Paul's opening chords is more one-dimensional.

Paul's musical background stretches from '60s and '70s English bands, especially Zeppelin, to the Byrds. But clearly, his lead guitar playing owes a lot to Jimmy Page and Page's approach to the construction of a solo. Paul's vibrato, when he bends a note, is overlooked for some reason. But any good guitar player will tell you his vibrato is as sweet as honey.

PETER CRISS

Kiss's founding drummer, Peter Criss was part of the trio, with Stanley and Simmons, that made up the first Kiss lineup. The original Catman was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with Kiss in 2014.

The music speaks for itself. Paul has always strived to be creative. He's accomplished that. His guitar playing is part of our creation of Kiss, which has inspired many. That in itself is a great honor for him as a musician. In my opinion, anyone who's inspired somebody musically should be proud that they've touched people's lives in that way. That's how I feel about Paul's guitar playing. He's touched people's lives musically, in a good way.

BRUCE KULICK

During Kiss's "unmasked" period, from 1984 to 1996, Bruce Kulick served as the group's lead guitarist, appearing on *Asylum*, *Crazy Nights*, *Hot in the Shade*, *Revenge* and *Carnival of Souls: The Final Sessions*, as well as *Alive III* and *MTV Unplugged*.

Working with Paul Stanley for 12 years gave me a keen insight to his guitar playing and musical talents. In the studio, he's a solid rhythm player. He has a large vocabulary of power chords in all positions, even complex inversions, as well as learning a few tricks from another hero of his, Keith Richards. He adopted for Kiss the five-string tuning Stones sound from Richards for Kiss hits like "Heaven's on Fire" and others.

Paul was brilliant with lead guitar suggestions. On "Tears Are Falling," one of the best representations of my contributions to Kiss solos, Paul guided me with the melodic start of that solo. We dressed it up with a sweet harmony line, and then he handed the tricky work over to me, with my choice of Steve Howe–like flashy riffs, and then a fast flourish to end the solo. That collaboration would continue throughout my years with Kiss.

THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE (HALL OF FAME); JEN ROSENSTEIN (SIMMONS); CINDY ORD/GETTY IMAGES (CRISS); DENISE TRUSCELLO/WIREIMAGE (KULICK)

TOMMY THAYER

Since 2003, Tommy Thayer has served as Kiss's lead guitarist, as well as co-writer for many of the group's songs. Even before then, he helped Frehley and Criss re-learn their parts when the original group reunited in 1996. He is, as he told *Guitar World* in 2020, "the glue that kept the band together for a long period of time."

The thing that always impressed me about Paul were his voicings and the alternate rhythm guitar parts he would add to complement what the other guitar player was doing. For instance, on "Cold Gin," the main riff is what I do, or what Ace did, and then Paul's doing this suspended A chord thing that just kind of stays in one spot, but it's really cool and interesting. In "100,000 Years" he hits these kind of augmented E suspended parts — I'm not even sure what it is — but he plays all these really interesting chords that complement the two-guitar approach.

Last year, when we were in Australia, we decided to do "Shandi" [*a Stanley-composed hit from the group's 1980 album,* Unmasked] as one of the encores, because that was a big song over there at one point. We were rehearsing "Shandi" before we left, and I had always assumed it was played using big open chords. But Paul said, "Oh no," and started showing me these different positions on the neck. I had no idea that this stuff was in that song.

I grew up loving two-guitar bands and I thought Kiss was one of the bands that did that better than anybody. But part of what makes the sound of Kiss is Paul's approach. It's very rhythmic and very soulful, with a lot of feeling. But his style is not a super-clean style; it's kind of rough and loose and not a precise kind of approach. It's a "feel" thing, so it creates a certain kind of a sound when you put all the guitars together.

When it comes to lead, he knows what he wants to hear, and that's almost more of a pure approach, because he's going to figure out what he hears in his head that actually can be more of a signature and more memorable. The solos he plays are very cool and you never forget them.

ERIC SINGER

Kiss's drummer since 1991 — barring several years during the original group's late-1990s reunion — Eric Singer has appeared on the studio albums *Sonic Boom* and *Monster*. He is the band's longest-serving non-original member.

I always use the Rolling Stones analogy — Paul being like Keith Richards. Some people play really tight and on the money, and others play with a looser, scrappier approach. And that scrappiness, that rawness, is what helps create a person's style and feel. I've noticed when somebody else plays a Kiss riff, they play it differently. With Paul, since he wrote a lot of those riffs and those parts, it always sounds right. It's his idea and his feel and interpretation of it, which makes it him.

Here's the best example I can give: We were recording a new song we had cut with Tommy, Gene and myself. I said, "Paul, it needs your guitar. That's what's going to glue it together, and your guitar playing will give it that Kiss sound." And as soon as Paul put the guitar on, it was like, Okay, now it sounds like Kiss.

TRIBUTE

ACE FREHLEY

As co-captains of Kiss's six-string guitar army, both on record and in concert, Paul Stanley and Ace Frehley created a towering body of powerful anthemic music that rocketed them to superstardom and decades later earned them entry into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

In the early days, Paul and Gene were writing a lot of the songs. Paul was doing the chord work, and he laid down the heavy rhythm parts. Paul's a really good rhythm player, Gene's an underrated bass player, and I was the icing on the cake. Paul and I had a strong chemistry together, which really worked well. The way we'd divvy up guitar parts was pretty natural. There wasn't much discussion. I knew what Paul was going to do. He played me the song before, and then I'd try to figure out a rhythm part that would complement what he was doing. A lot of times, Paul would come up with a rhythm part and I'd do an octave part above it. That would make the song sound thicker.

"Strutter" is a good example of that. Paul would be playing parts that were lower, and I'd be playing it in a high register. I learned that if two guys play chords in the same exact position, it can sound muddier. I was always trying to do inversions of what Paul was playing to make it sound thicker. It's the same idea I use in the studio. I'll put down a rhythm track with a Les Paul and then double it with a Fender, which has a completely different harmonic range.

I thought all the lead work Paul did over the years was good because it was simple, straight to the point and melodic. His riff that kicks off "Deuce" is really cool. Paul and I co-wrote "Rock Bottom." I wrote the picking part in the front of the song, and he came up with something that complemented what I was playing.

Bob Ezrin was a big help in getting me and Paul to play together. For instance, the guitar solo on "Detroit Rock City" — that harmony Paul and I did together — always stands out in my mind as a dual lead that we played together. When I look back on our history, I wish we would have done more of that.

"WHAT ALWAYS IMPRESSED ME ABOUT PAUL WERE HIS VOICINGS AND THE ALTERNATE RHYTHM GUITAR PARTS THAT HE WOULD ADD" — TOMMY THAYER

TOTAL GUITAR MAGAZINE (FREHLEY); JEN ROSENSTEIN (THAYER & SINGER)

usually a Marshall amp, and if you couldn't get that sound, you needed a new amp or a new guitar.

Prior to that, I had a Hagstrom 12-string electric guitar, because I couldn't afford a Rickenbacker and I was very into the Byrds, and for that you needed a 12-string. Then I got rid of that and got the SG Les Paul. And from there, for quite a while, I would trade out a guitar to get a different one.

My next guitar after the SG Les Paul was a Gibson double-cut Les Paul, which was $200. Guitars were not out of reach at that point. Dan Armstrong on 48th Street had all these classic vintage guitars and a wall full of mid-'50s to '59 and '60 Les Pauls: gold tops, sunbursts. The expensive ones could be $700, $800, which to me was a fortune. But compared to what they wound up being valued at now, they were attainable. No, guitars were not investments at that point. People weren't buying them like art or stocks.

> "MY MOM HAD HAWKED A WONDERFUL DIAMOND RING AND GOT ME A FENDER TWIN REVERB; I HAD NO PEDALS OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT"

What was your practice regimen? Were you picking up songbooks and learning from those, and slowing down records to learn and master parts?

Early on, I realized that I didn't want to be the flashy lead player. As much as I admired them and wanted much to be like them, I became much more involved with being a rhythm guitarist. Very often, rhythm guitar was looked at as what you do before you can play lead. And there were certainly consummate guitar players who, yes, they could play lead guitar, but that wasn't their wheelhouse, really. Whether it was Keith Richards or Pete Townshend — or even David Crosby or one of the greatest right hands ever, Richie Havens — that was more fascinating to me: not what the left hand was doing, but what the right hand was doing.

When my son, Evan, started playing guitar — and by the way, he's just a smoking great guitar player — in the beginning I said to him, "Right now it's all about your right hand. It's all about your wrist. It's all about your palm. It's all about those subtleties." And that, I think, is a great foundation to start with. How far you want to go after that is really up to you. I mean, Jimmy Page is just a killer rhythm player who happens to also be a spectacular lead player and arranger. But his rhythm playing is as good as anybody's, and better than most.

What was the first holy grail guitar that you bought?

Well, I started collecting guitars in the mid-'70s, when I could finally afford to have more than one guitar. And I found myself wanting to acquire a prime example of what were the top guitars. At that point, the word went out and people started bringing guitars to our shows, and when we would pull in there'd be people standing out back with guitar cases. So it made it really fun.

The first guitar I bought that was of that stature was a '58 sunburst Les Paul with cream humbuckers, and I paid $2,200 for it, which was a fortune. I wound up with nine guitars that were really outstanding examples of each specific model, and the start of it was the '58 sunburst.

Let's talk about some of the guitars you used early on with Kiss.

Early on I played a Gibson Les Paul '54 reissue that came out in the '70s. The first really good guitar I had was a 1960 Gibson SG Les Paul, which is when they were making the transition from Les Paul guitars to what later became SG guitars. I also had a custom-made guitar, a half Flying V. It was made by a guy in the Village named Charlie LoBue [*who*

KEVIN NIXON/CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE; (OPPOSITE) DUNCAN RABAN/POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES (1988)

TRIBUTE

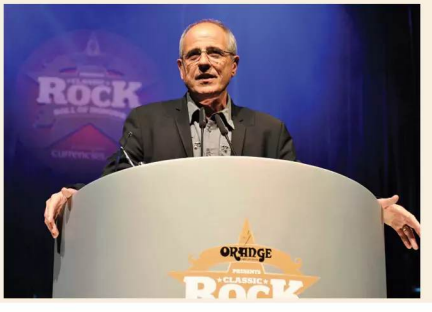
BOB EZRIN

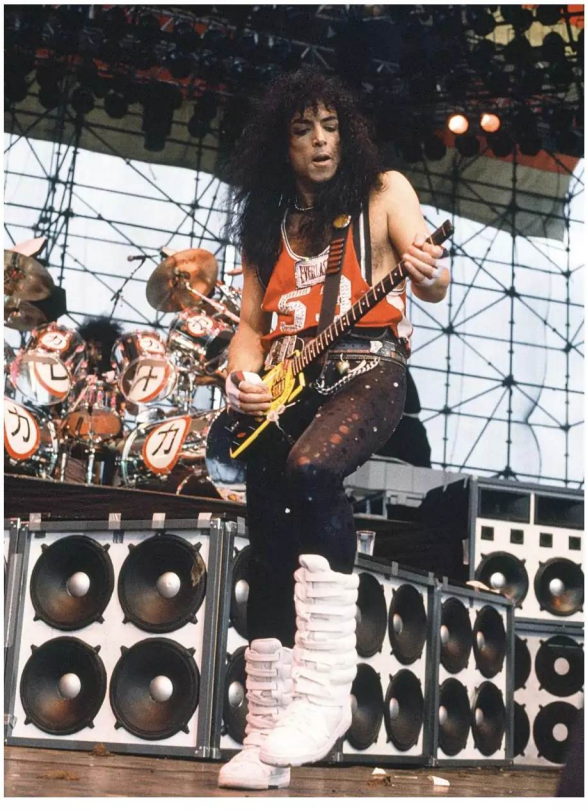
As producer of three Kiss albums — *Destroyer*, *(Music From) The Elder* and *Revenge* — Bob Ezrin has also served as arranger, songwriter and band coach, spurring the band to their creative apex.

"Paul's superpower as a guitar player is his melodic sense. He has a unique understanding of the power of melody and rhythm, and he combines the two in his rhythm playing in particular, but also in his lead playing. There's always a memorable, hummable component to Paul Stanley's lead guitar. To me, there's a melodic structure to his rhythm, the positions of the chords that he plays. And when you add them all up, they actually create a melody. And I think he's very sensitive to that as he's putting his parts together, as opposed to many guitar players who will play the chord for that specific moment without regard to the next one that's coming or the one that came before. What Paul creates is a melodic structure to his rhythm parts. So the voicings that he selects from one chord to the next are the ones that feature the leading note.

"When he and Ace would play together, you could hear each part individually, but they sound together as one. If Paul was in first position, Ace would move up, and vice versa, so they were not treading on each other's toes. They were trying to be a bit of an orchestra between the two of them, and I think they did a great job.

"I've heard from people from all genres — Garth Brooks to start with — who have said to me that Kiss was a huge inspiration and influence on them. I don't think people looked at the individual membership of the band as being responsible for this note or that note. I think they just took the overall of the band and said, 'Oh God, I want to be able to do that. I *can* do that.'"





ABOVE: Stanley performs with his Ibanez Cracked Mirror Iceman in Chicago, September 22, 1979 .

TOP RIGHT: Simmons and Stanley onstage at Domination Festival, Mexico City, May 3, 2019.

RIGHT CENTER: Playing a Washburn PS12 Starfire at the Austin360 Amphitheater, July 12, 2014.

RIGHT BOTTOM: Performing with a Steinberger on the *Crazy Nights* World Tour, circa 1988.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES (1979); GARY MILLER (2014); ADRIÁN MONROY/MEDIOS Y MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES (2019)

also made Gene Simmons' basses early on]. It was stolen at our first New York gig, with [*first-wave punk artist*] Wayne County. Then one of my favorite guitars, a Gibson Firebird, got wrecked. This guy, Corky Stasiak, who was the assistant engineer on *Destroyer*, knocked it over in the studio and broke the neck off. It couldn't be repaired. So Gibson made me a copy of it. Ultimately, I lent the copy to somebody, and they sold it. [*laughs*]

Were you using some of these vintage guitars in the studio, onstage or both?

I would use them in the studio. I would never take them on tour, for a couple of reasons. The look of the band has always been so specific that the idea of being up there with a sunburst Les Paul wasn't character consistent. So ultimately I wound up designing the Ibanez PS10, which really was based upon all my favorite Gibson guitars. The specs came off a bunch of guitars that I loved, and the construction was based on a mahogany body with a maple cap, and a mahogany neck, so it was very familiar. And if you play one, it feels very familiar, because the specifics — as far as the measurements and construction and all the hardware go — are classic. They're tried and true.

A glam-rock hero inspired the creation of your cracked mirror Ibanez Iceman guitar.

Yes, that's right. My mirror Iceman guitar was actually not a unique or original idea. Noddy Holder from Slade had a top hat with these huge circular mirrors on it. So when they hit Noddy's top hat with the lights, these beams seemed to come out of his head. It was such a cool idea, and that's where the idea for the mirrored guitar came from. In many ways, Slade was the English counterpart to us. They wrote these great anthems. Live, they were simple, but, boy, did they put their boot up your ass!

Humble Pie were one of your primary influences for the sound of Kiss.

Yes, they most certainly were one of the inspirations behind Kiss's sound. Steve Marriott was a terrific rhythm player. Seeing them perform at the Fillmore and watching Steve Marriott command and preach to an audience was something that inspired me, and his approach was something that I wanted to do onstage, but in my own way.

In terms of your chord choices, positions and inversions, who were you channeling?

In the early days of Humble Pie, Steve Marriott and Peter Frampton created a sound like one big guitar. That was a part of the template for what I wanted to do. I've always wanted Kiss to be like one big guitar, which means that the other guitarist and I play different inversions. The goal was to do something that one guitar couldn't, but play it in a way so that it becomes like one big guitar.

My first exposure to the blues was Albert, Freddie and B.B. King and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. I really appreciated what they were doing, but I was more intrigued with where things went from there. Still, I think to do your best as a musician, you need to be exposed to a variety of music that's outside of what you innately do. That's why there are Kiss songs where I can point out the Spinners; there are Kiss songs where I can point out the Four Tops, Free — all kinds of groups. I grew up listening to opera and show tunes and R&B, and I went to bluegrass hootenannys and over to the Village and saw Dave Van Ronk at the Gaslight Cafe. For me, it was all about funneling everything that I was exposed to and loved into something else.

With Keith Richards, when I heard things like "Jumpin' Jack Flash" or "Brown Sugar," I didn't realize that he was playing in open G,

"THAT WAS MORE FASCINATING TO ME: NOT WHAT THE LEFT HAND WAS DOING, BUT WHAT THE RIGHT HAND WAS DOING"

JEN ROSENSTEIN

so a lot of my playing was about using sus chords and trying to get that feel. It wasn't until, gosh, the '70s that I realized I could take my low E string off and tune to an open G. So a lot of my playing was rhythm-based. My songs and a lot of the riffs I came up with were based on my limitations, which sometimes can be your biggest asset. I might start a lick and not know where to go and just throw in something basic. That's what I did with [*1976's* Destroyer *cut*] "God of Thunder." I had the beginning of the riff and I didn't know where to go, so I bent those chords after the riff. With "I Want You" [*from 1976's* Rock and Roll Over], I had the riff and I didn't know where to go halfway through it, so I did a bunch of hammer-ons on the G string. So I was inspired by a lot of people and took what I could within the scope of what I could do, or wanted to do.

> "MY SONGS AND A LOT OF MY RIFFS THAT I WOULD COME UP WITH WERE BASED ON MY LIMITATIONS, WHICH SOMETIMES CAN BE YOUR BIGGEST ASSET"

With songs like "Flaming Youth," "Shout It Out Loud", "Comin' Home" and countless others, I hear a lot of Pete Townshend in your playing and approach.
Well, if an orchestra played the same figures the same way time and time again, it would get repetitious. But it's how you build on a theme, and that theme can be chordal; it can be a riff. But to me, the best themes don't stay stagnant; they evolve as the song evolves. Back to Zeppelin, Jimmy is Beethoven. Jimmy uses textures and layers, different kinds of guitars, and builds parts and elaborates on themes. I've said to him, "The first time I saw Zeppelin, I was 17, and it raised the bar for me to a level that I felt I can't achieve. But it's important to know that that level exists."

Jimmy Page reigns supreme as your guitar god.
I was aware of the lineage and the history of the role of the hot-shot guitar hero in the Yardbirds, starting with Eric Clapton who left to join John Mayall's Blues Breakers and was replaced by Jeff Beck, who at one point was joined by his friend Jimmy Page. Although I didn't see that lineup, I saw the Yardbirds in New York after Beck had left and Jimmy was playing lead. When I saw the Yardbirds live, I was blown away by his ability to play what had already been done and still give it his own interpretation. For me, in many ways, he was the future.

What was interesting about the guitar players in the Yardbirds is how they all had a love for the blues and took it in different directions, particularly when you listen to Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page, who seemed less purist and more adventurous. It's interesting to note that both the Jeff Beck Group, which Beck formed after his stint in the Yardbirds, and Led Zeppelin virtually came about at the same time. Led Zeppelin's first show as Led Zeppelin was October of 1968, and they were rehearsing before that. The Jeff Beck album *Truth* came out in late July of '68, so both in a sense were incubating at the same time.

It's interesting how Jimmy Page's vision of what was possible was so much broader and wider. He understood the complexities and subtleties of producing and arranging and brought that to his band. As brilliant as Jeff Beck was, that's something he couldn't do, whether it was the limitations of the people he played with, which he himself has said he found frustrating, or just the fact that Jimmy Page consistently turned out to be a visionary. Beck had to use his

TRIBUTE

RICK NIELSEN

Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons were such big fans of Cheap Trick that they brought them out as openers on their Can-Am Tour '77. In the Cheap Trick anthem "Surrender," Nielsen famously name-checked the band in the lyrics, "got my Kiss records out." Like Joe Perry, Nielsen guested on Gene's 1978 solo album and decades later jammed with the band at a 2016 gig in Cheap Trick's hometown of Rockford, Illinois.

"Gene and Paul saw Cheap Trick play in New York City at Max's Kansas City. There was hardly anybody there, but they were clapping and really enjoyed the band. I jumped up on the table where Paul and Gene were, and there was a bill there, and I picked it up and I put it in my mouth and ate it. I think Gene told the story that it was a $100 bill, but I think I shit out a $20. [*laughs*]

"We did three months opening for Kiss in June, July and August of 1977, which went across the whole United States and Canada. The Japanese press was there to see Kiss, because they were huge in Japan. They liked our band so much that we started getting a lot of press in Japan, and that's what really boosted our career, which made us do that record at Budokan [*1978's* Cheap Trick at Budokan].

"Back in the '70s, I was at Paul's New York apartment and he had a lot of guitars on the wall. He knew I was a guitar collector too. A few years ago he introduced me to a guy named Gordon Miller, and he's built me some guitars and cases because of Paul.

"My favorite Kiss songs are all the ones they played on the tour we did with them. But if I had to pick one it's 'Love Gun.' Why? Because it reminds me of the Sex Pistols. Same word connotations. Love Guns. Sex Pistols. There you go."

THOMAS W. GILES - CLASSICROCK-PHOTOS.COM

THIS PAGE: Stanley plays his Hamer Vector , circa 1983.

OPPOSITE: Performing with one of his custom-modified Gibson Flying Vs on the End of the World Tour, circa 2019.

phenomenal guitar talents to compensate for a lack of interesting or original material.

Ace loved Jimmy Page. He very much had a Page sensibility to his playing. The idea of having another guitar player, at least to me, was to play the stuff I couldn't. I had no problems holding down the fort in terms of chords and rhythms, but somebody had to blow the roof off with a wailing solo, and Ace really had the goods. As much as Ace loved Clapton, Beck and Hendrix, and he really did, there's so much Page and so much swagger in his early playing. It's so clear and so obvious that some of Ace's signature licks are very much inspired by Jimmy Page. There's a lot in "100,000 Years" [*from Kiss's self-titled 1974 debut*]. There's loads of things there that are, at least for my money, quintessential Page.

Let's talk about your guitar interplay with Ace. What made that chemistry work for such a long time as a complementary partnership?

Ace was a very good rhythm player and really played methodical solos. His solos made sense. They weren't noodling. They were thematic, and as a rhythm guitar player he was solid and could play more than your basic first position. So it helped to create what I wanted to do, which was have that sound of one big guitar. And as I said, that has always meant two people playing different inversions and playing tight enough that it's something that neither one could do on their own. Ace and I played well together. We really did.

In the studio when you're working up songs, was there a lot of discussion between you and Ace coming up with complementary parts for each to play?

Thankfully, there wasn't a lot of that. We didn't have to work at it. It was intuitive, and we were both capable of playing rhythm, and that gave us the flexibility and the ability to pretty instinctively play different inversions of chords and do things that at least to our ears were sonically pleasing.

What was the process in terms of layering guitars? Would you change up guitars if you were doubling a rhythm track yourself? Would you try an SG and then bring in a Les Paul, or would you pretty much stick with the same guitar?

Depends on what we were doing. At one point, we would record a guitar part, and then we would vari-speed the tape ever so slightly when we doubled it so that between the two guitars there was much more of a shimmer as opposed to just doubling it. That's something Bob Ezrin taught us. For the most part, a "double" meant doubling my part, not changing and using another guitar.

I think that, at least for this kind of music, you can overthink it. It's not unlike when we were in the studio at one point with one producer and he brought in all these amps and said, "Well, this sounds like a Marshall and does this, this and this, and this amp

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (1977); KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR SIRIUSXM (ROCK HALL)

TRIBUTE

TOM MORELLO

The Kiss Army owes a deep debt of gratitude to Tom Morello. He single-handedly duked it out with the snooty Rock and Roll Hall of Fame brass over the merits of Kiss's long-overdue induction. Victorious in his zealous mission, he's responsible for getting Kiss on the ballot and paving the way for their ultimate induction into the hallowed institution.

"What makes Kiss great is the chemistry of the members, especially the classic Kiss lineup, and Paul Stanley's guitar playing is a huge part of that. 'Strutter,' 'C'mon and Love Me,' 'God of Thunder,' 'Creatures of the Night' through 'Psycho Circus' — he's writing and playing those riffs, and those songs are some of the most rocking and important tunes in the history of rock and roll. So, he's not Yngwie Malmsteen or Nuno Bettencourt. But thank goodness, because he's writing these jams that make up one of the greatest bands of all time.

"Listen, rock and roll is not just about moving your fingers around fast on the frets. One of the most iconic and identifiable guitar players in the history of rock music is Paul Stanley, and his guitar playing is directly connected to his seven-inch heels and his hair. His guitar playing is directly connected to his makeup and the tone of voice he uses when addressing the crowd, and the way that he's swinging on guitars and swinging around the arena and pointing to the back row. His guitar playing is a part of all of that. It's a crucial reason why Kiss is great, and it's a crucial reason why he's a very important guitar player."

"I WENT TO HOOTENANNYS AND SAW DAVE VAN RONK AT THE GASLIGHT CAFE. IT WAS ALL ABOUT FUNNELING EVERYTHING I WAS EXPOSED TO INTO SOMETHING ELSE"

ROBERT HALFON

GEAR TOUR

KISS OFF

T.J. Silljer, Paul's End of the Road guitar tech, fills us in on the Starchild's stage arsenal for Kiss's final shows.

When it comes down to it, all it takes for Paul Stanley to get his game on is a guitar plugged straight into an amp. "We have tried different things in the rig, as far as modular effects or overdrives," explains T.J. Silljer, Stanley's guitar tech on the End of the Road tour. "But at the end of the day, we usually just plug directly into the amp and Paul ends up saying, 'Nothing sounds better than a great guitar plugged straight into a great amp.' We only use one channel on the amp for the whole show. If he wants a little less gain, he uses his volume knob to clean it up a bit. That's one of my favorite things about Paul: I love how old school he is with regard to guitar."

Below, T.J. provides details on Stanley's End of the Road rig, as well as some photos of his gear.

MAIN GUITARS

Ibanez PS10 (Black, Gold, Cracked Mirror, Rhinestone)
Gibson Custom Shop "Custom" V Modified by Billy Rowe
Ibanez PS60 (used as breakers)

According to Siljer, "Each V was customized to suit Paul's specifications. Body contour, neck profile, frets, hardware, finish and pickups were all changed to make a unique Paul Stanley version of a Gibson classic. Paul doesn't want to play the same thing everyone else is playing, so he prototyped his own version of the V, making changes to the neck, hardware, body, finish, frets, pickups and adding a custom tailpiece. He wanted a great-playing and great-feeling guitar, but also wanted a unique piece of art you can't find anywhere else."

PICKUPS

Ibanez PS10
Seymour Duncan SH-1N '59
Seymour Duncan SH-14 Custom 5
Gibson V
Seymour Duncan SH-1N '59
Silljer Pickups True Heritage P.A.F.

STRINGS

PS10
Ernie Ball Custom Gauge 13–52
Gibson V
Ernie Ball Beefy Slinky 11–54

PICKS

Dunlop celluloid .73

GUITAR TUNINGS

D standard on all guitars

AMP & CABINET

ENGL Paul Stanley signature model
Marshall 1960B Cabinet

"Paul knows exactly the sound he is looking for," Silljer explains. "When playing the PS10 guitars, we have the Duncan Custom 5 in the bridge. That pickup is straight rock and roll tone, and his custom ENGL amp was built around this guitar and pickup. With this guitar-and-amp combination, we usually run everything at 12 o'clock and make small adjustments from there. For the Gibson V, we run a slightly lower-output PAF-style pickup I wound, and I bump up the gain to match output for the front of house."

STRAPS

Custom leather beaded strap by Carlino Guitars

MICS

Shure SM58

For more information, visit paulstanleyguitars.com.

T.J. SILLJER

sounds like a Fender." And I said, [*laughing*] "Well, if it sounds like a Marshall, then let's just get a Marshall."

All the bands and all the people that I loved and saw and inspired me, they were basically playing a Gibson guitar plugged into a Marshall amp. And if you got a Gibson guitar and a Marshall amp and it didn't sound good, you either needed a new Gibson guitar or a new Marshall amp. It was just that simple. Even in the last decade, there have been times where guitar players and other bands have said, "Your guitar tone is so great. What are you using?" And it's a guitar and an amp and all those other things that people use to try to replicate that vintage sound. I think they're on the wrong track. It's in your hands and it's in your guitar and amp.

> "SLADE WAS THE ENGLISH COUNTERPART TO US. THEY WROTE GREAT ANTHEMS — AND, BOY, DID THEY PUT THEIR BOOT UP YOUR ASS"

With respect to your lead playing, I definitely hear a lot of Paul Kossoff, with that great slow vibrato. When I was speaking with Bob Ezrin about your guitar solos, he described them as vocal melodies that are beautifully constructed.

Bob is right. I tend to think melodically and vocally when I play a solo. It's not enough to me to play scales. I'd rather memorize a solo based upon a melody as opposed to a scale.

Your solo on "A World Without Heroes" from *"(Music From) The Elder"* may be your shining moment as a lead player. Did you experiment in the studio to come up with that, or was it prepared beforehand as a written solo?

I just created it while in the studio. It had an emotional feel to the song, and all I was doing was connecting to that. A solo has got to be so much more than playing in the right key. It's about the expressiveness and the emotion. I think that comes more from a solo that somebody can sing. That's going to have more emotion in it than somebody doing acrobatics. I may be impressed by the acrobatics, but it does nothing for me emotionally.

I'm not that kind of player, and I'm not interested in others who do that. I certainly respect and appreciate people who can play with dazzling speed and cram more notes into a measure than the average player, but it does nothing for me. It's an exercise in futility. It's nothing more than gibberish.

With Ace, and then later with Vinnie Vincent, Mark St. John, Bruce Kulick and Tommy Thayer, how much input would you have into their solos?

I have to say that when Ace was great, he was great, and he came up with so many memorable parts and solos. I can't remember anything that he was told to do, except the run up in "Love Gun," which is from a Blues Magoos song called "(We Ain't Got) Nothin' Yet." Deep Purple nicked that same run. But other than that, Ace really came up with some very identifiable and really stellar guitar solos, not because they were incredibly intricate but because they made a lot of sense and some of it was counterpoint to what we were playing rhythmically. He did some very interesting things.

So when it came to working with Ace, I don't remember ever suggesting anything to him. He took the reins and galloped on. I can say that there are solos later on after Ace was gone, that, if I didn't play them, I sang them to the guitarist and they learned it. I will say that many of the solos and pieces on *Creatures of the Night* certainly sound familiar to me. I mean, just because I can't play something doesn't mean I can't sing it, right?

TRIBUTE

PHIL COLLEN

Along with Joe Perry and Rick Nielsen, Def Leppard's Phil Collen is in elite company as one of only a few axe slingers who have shared the stage jamming with Kiss.

"Ace would play the solos, but the meat and potatoes of it was all the Paul Stanley rhythm stuff. It's really substantial, and he gets the song over with singing and playing. Kiss created this kind of Marvel superhero thing and they put it to music.

"What surprised me most about Kiss is that it's all about the show. But they also had the concert anthems to back it up. When they asked me to come up and play with them, I was honored. I've known them for years and they're great. I like their approach and their whole vibe to it; they take it very seriously.

"The hardest part was trying to walk around in those boots! [*laughs*]. I had to walk around all day in them to get used to them. I wound up wearing a set of Paul's boots, which had seven-inch heels. You had to be really careful, because you could easily bust your ankle. I had to have some supports around the ankles, like a skier.

"As I was walking onstage, the production manager said, 'Oh, by the way, don't go past that line.' I said, 'Why?' and he said, 'Because the flames will get you.' I was like, Oh my God! So I'm trying to stay balanced wearing these seven-inch boots playing 'Deuce,' and you could feel all this fire coming up from behind you. But that was such fun. It was such a thrill to play with Kiss. I was honored."

MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES

50 YEARS OF KISS

GENE SIMMONS' —LAST— STAND

As Kiss bring their career to a rousing end, **the Demon** reflects on their 50-year journey from New York City punks to global superstars.

BY KEN SHARP

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEN ROSENSTEIN

"AT THE END of the day, Mother Nature and Father Time get their comeuppance," Gene Simmons offers, philosophically. "They put their hand out and say, 'Okay, time for you to pay us for this wonderful life you've led.' You have to have the dignity, self-respect and pride to know when it's time to get off that stage."

Making that move hasn't been easy for Simmons. When Kiss wrap up their nearly four-year-long End of the Road tour on December 2, it will bring the group's 50-year reign to a rousing finale. Kiss have taken their sweet time crossing the finish line, but when it's over, the 74-year-old bassist will be able to look back at a life and career of his own choosing and making.

It's not an exaggeration to say no dream was impossible to achieve for Simmons. He was born into a "dirt-poor" family and immigrated to the United States from Israel when he was just eight. He learned to speak English from watching TV and, later, in 1964, was inspired to become a rock musician after seeing the Beatles perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Fueled by a tsunami of ambition, ego and a relentless work ethic, his larger-than-life vision brought him and his bandmates unfathomable fame and fortune and entry into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

As Kiss play the final dates on their End of the Road tour, which winds up, aptly, in their hometown with a two-gig engagement at Madison Square Garden, we caught up with the Demon for a look back at how it all began — and what happens when the curtain rings down on Kiss for the final time.

Let's go back almost 50 years to the first Kiss gig at Coventry, formerly the Popcorn Pub, in Queens, New York.

I remember passing by a place that used to be the Popcorn Pub in Woodside, Queens, New York. It was not a very cool place. Paul and I were just coming off of Wicked Lester [*their pre-Kiss band*]. We had a manager whose name was Lew Linet. He managed [*singer-songwriter*] Diana Marcovitz and a band called J.F. Murphy & Free Flowing Salt, who were signed to Elektra, I believe. Eddie Kramer may have engineered their record, or produced it. Lew was a nice guy, but he was not a rock guy. As Paul and I were transitioning from Wicked Lester to Kiss, Peter [*Criss*] joined us in the fall of 1972 and we played as a trio for two months before Ace [*Frehley*] came in. I paid for the loft we were rehearsing in, because I had a job and I was able to afford to pay most of the $200-a-month rent. Paul would chip in every once in a while when he drove a cab. Paul and I went down to Manny's Music Shop on 48th Street to buy a Peavey sound system, and I remember he did contribute some money, but whatever shortfall there was, I'd have to cover.

What kind of bass were you playing for those shows?

We hadn't as yet done shows. We were rehearsing. There was a guy named Charlie LoBue who made handmade guitars. I remember telling him to build me a smaller-body bass guitar, almost the size of a Les Paul Junior, with that kind of body style and with two horns. That would later become the prototype for what became my Punisher, a bass with a fully exposed neck so I could slide all the

way up the neck and play harmonies with the guitar, so it wouldn't sound like a bass playing it.

So we were a trio at this point, and for a short time we thought, Hey, we're going to be a power trio. Paul could sing, I could sing, and Peter could sing. We liked his "whiskey" voice. Paul could write songs, and I could write songs, so what else do you need? And maybe we'd write songs more like the Who, where you didn't have to have lots of solo guitar playing. We were not yet called Kiss. As a power trio, we were playing new songs we'd just written, like "Deuce," "Strutter" and "Black Diamond." Originally, we thought, Gee, this doesn't sound bad; you don't need a lead guitar. But then when the middle section of "Deuce" came up, we couldn't just keep playing the chords over and over again. Paul didn't feel comfortable enough to do the solos, so we started to look for a lead guitar player.

But before that, Lew Linet came in and had ear plugs on, and he kept saying, "Why are you guys playing so loudly?" So we immediately knew, this is not the guy for us; he doesn't understand. And in the nicest way, we went up to his office and said we should split, and that it's just not working for us, and he agreed and was a gentleman about it, and so were we. And we wished him well.

And then, of course, when Ace joined the band, those stories we've told about that day are like a fictional cartoon show. It might have been a segment of *The Simpsons*, where this guy comes in with an orange sneaker and a red sneaker and, oblivious to anybody else auditioning any other guitar player, he just plugs in and starts playing.

And you screamed at him and told him to shut up.
Exactly right. Poor Bob Kulick was just finishing up auditioning, and we knew it wasn't working. Bob could play, but it was left up to me to give someone the bad news. I walked up to Ace with poor Bob Kulick in the room, looking around and not knowing what's going on. I said to Ace, "Can you shut the fuck up? What are you doing? Sit down. We're in the middle of auditioning." Ace said, "Oh, I'm sorry." He was oblivious to the fact that there was anybody there. But even with his eccentricities, Ace was our guy.

Ace joined in December 1972, and less than two months later Kiss played their first gig at Coventry, on January 30, 1973. Why did you choose this club?
I called the Daisy in Amityville, New York to get us gigs, and I was also the guy that called Coventry. For one thing, we couldn't play anywhere else. There was no demand. We were a brand-new band, and we weren't playing hits. You could get a gig more easily

ABOVE LEFT: Kiss appear in a 1977 TV special, *NBC Reports: The Land of the Hype & Glory*. The man at far left is Kiss manager Bill Aucoin. NBC News' reporter Edwin Newman is to Simmons' left.

ABOVE RIGHT: Gene in an undated photo with what appears to be the last incarnation of his Charlie LoBue custom bass. The presence of the three speed knobs suggests this is from late 1975 or early 1976.

RIGHT: Gene and Paul clown for the camera as Gene gets his massive boots on during the *Rock & Roll Over* tour, February 1977.

at a club if you played the local hits. We were not playing covers. We were a totally original band. Not only that, right around that time, we decided, Hey, let's wear makeup. So that was happening at the same time, but we didn't have a manager.

For our first gig at Coventry, which we played a few times, we got the sum total of $35 for two or three nights. The fact that we got those Daisy and Coventry gigs is because I'm a silver-tongued devil. I tell people what they want to hear: "Oh, we're the best thing since sliced bread," and, "We're *heavy metal* masters" — we used that term when it wasn't commonly used, and we didn't have a clue what it meant.

For that first show at Coventry, there were about 10 people there: my then-girlfriend Jan Walsh; her best friend, who was going out with her brother; Lydia, Peter Criss's wife at the time; and very few others. Nobody knew and nobody cared. But when we were onstage doing "Strutter," "Deuce" and "Black Diamond," we felt it. We knew it. It was finally the chemistry, finally the sound and the vibe and the look, with the right guys that we had imagined, and very few things in life turn out that way. It's that chemistry thing. Now, of course, some chemistry can be volatile. You put the wrong chemistry together and it burns up or explodes.

> "HE JUST PLUGGED IN AND STARTED PLAYING. BUT EVEN WITH HIS ECCENTRICITIES, ACE WAS OUR GUY"

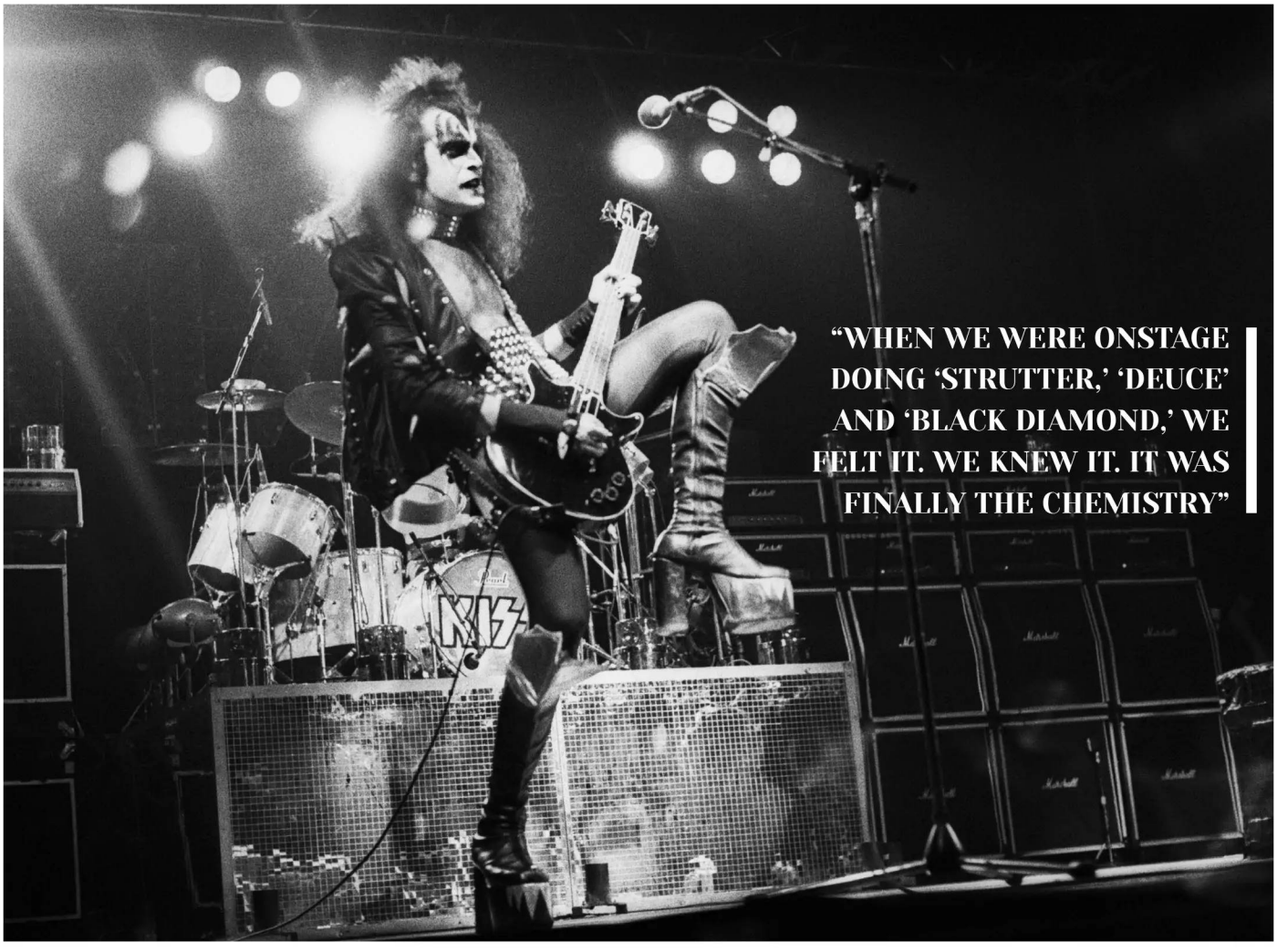
When do you think you, Paul, Ace and Peter really started to find your mojo as live performers?

Well, initially, there was that sense of, Wow, this is a real band, and that happened at the Daisy. People had come to see us. This was after Coventry. When we were onstage, there was a real energy. You'd look across the stage and we're doing all this original material, and some of it, like "Too Young" and "Life in the Woods," we only played back in the club days. "Too Young" was written by me and was cut down and turned into the song "Acrobat."

But there was a full three or four minutes after that, and we're listening to ourselves and playing, looking across the stage and really getting off on it. In fact, Ace, had the makeup on without the white face, and when he looked into the Mylar reflection of Peter's drum kit, he started laughing. He was getting off on his own thing. Later on in our set, we're hearing the guitar playing and it sounds really good, and Ace is rocking out. And then we look across the stage — and he's not onstage! Somehow he'd climbed onto this ledge off the stage and was rocking out. He's always been like that.

And of course, during the performance of "Life in the Woods" — a "clap your hands together" kind of song — I remember stepping off the stage, in makeup, and going up to a girl who was clearly pregnant and taking the drink out of her hands, grabbing her hands and forcing her to clap. There was also a conga line that formed during that song. All kinds of crazy stuff was happening. We were finding our way at that early stage.

NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (GENE LIVE)



“WHEN WE WERE ONSTAGE DOING ‘STRUTTER,’ ‘DEUCE’ AND ‘BLACK DIAMOND,’ WE FELT IT. WE KNEW IT. IT WAS FINALLY THE CHEMISTRY”

Simmons performs onstage at RAI Congrescentrum, Amsterdam, on the *Alive!* tour, May 23, 1976.

(OPPOSITE PAGE) MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES (1977); (THIS PAGE) KEVIN WESTENBERG

As Kiss ramps up for the last dates on “The End of the Road” tour and the final shows the band will ever perform, take us through the evolution of a Kiss show — from the formative days playing in local dives into the ’70s OG band’s heyday and to the present day with the End of the Road tour and its over-the-top theatrics and bombast.

Managers either have vision and see the future — the big picture — or they’re like a bookkeeper, just keeping tabs on things. We were lucky to meet a guy named Bill Aucoin, who had a music TV show called *Flipside*, where they interviewed John Lennon in a recording studio. He was one of the names I found in the *Billboard* year-end issue, where they list all the major movers and shakers in the music business. I was working in an office at that point, the Puerto Rican Interagency Council, and I put together the bio kit. Peter, Paul and Ace were putting up posters around town. I remember mailing out invites to everybody, every record president. Bill Aucoin, even though he was not a manager or a producer or with a record label, he got the photo and the invite, and he showed up at our show at the Hotel Diplomat. For our show, we were still doing what we did at Coventry and the Daisy. Bill saw us and said, “Okay, I’m going to get you a deal in two weeks or you don’t have to use me as a manager.”

And he did. From there, he became the captain of the ship. He started talking early on about trademarks, and we didn’t know what that was. “Yeah, we’re going to trademark your faces so nobody can copy you.” “Oh, that sounds like a good idea.” Then he said, “We don’t want to let people see your real faces.” We said, “Well, why not? What about chicks and all that?” “No, no, you’ve got to keep up the mystery.” “Oh, okay, that sounds like a good idea.” He came up with that.

And it was Bill Aucoin who said, “Okay, we need to find gags.” Bill scoured around and found a company that could levitate the drum set. Bill brought in a magician named Amazo or something, a fire-breathing guy who was completely bald. We asked him, “Why are you bald?” and he said, “I have hair, but I shaved my head.” “Well, why do you want to do that?” And then when he spit fire in Bill Aucoin’s office and singed the ceiling, we said, “Oh, that’s why you shaved your head!” [*laughs*]

And for some reason Bill said, "One of you guys has got to spit fire during 'Firehouse.'" We said, "What? We're a rock band." And he said, "Yeah, don't worry about that." And somehow I wound up being the guy to spit fire. And the lit candelabra we used onstage was also the idea of Bill Aucoin.

Whose idea was it to introduce the lighted Kiss sign?

That came from Bill Aucoin. Sean Delaney, who was Bill's romantic partner and wrote songs with Paul, Ace and I, became our first tour manager. What happened in those early days is bands would just show up and play; you wouldn't have any logos or anything. But we had this very heavy sign with our name that had to be connected to electricity. And when the Kiss logo turned on, it was blinding, so much so that when the blackouts happened, you still saw the Kiss logo etched into your retina. We'd be opening for bands like Manfred Mann, Argent and Savoy Brown, and after we came off the stage, our logo would still be above their heads. As the English would say, we went down a storm and did very well, and we were called back to do encores.

The *Destroyer* tour ushered in a new level of theatrical presentation, which continues to evolve over the decades with the End of the Road stage set.

Yes, that's right. Later on, Paul and sometimes I would sit down and draw ideas for a new stage show. But in the beginning, Sean Delaney and Bill Aucoin would bring in technical people and designers who would sit there and go, "Okay, how about this and how about that?" The stage show for the *Destroyer*, *Rock & Roll Over* and *Love Gun* tours, all those were clearly not our ideas. In fact, we were rehearsing in a big airplane hangar in upstate New York, and when we came in and set up, in front of our eyes was something like a Disneyland haunted house, which was used on the *Destroyer* and *Rock & Roll Over* tours. We had no input in that.

> "IF YOU THINK IT'S JUST ABOUT PUTTING MAKEUP ON YOUR FACE AND YOU CAN HAVE A 50-YEAR CAREER, BOY, ARE YOU DREAMING"

How about the risers and the lighted stairs?

It was either Paul or myself that said, "Hey, how about lighting coming on, like Las Vegas? When the girls come down the stairs, the stairs light up." That idea might have come from us, but I never want to take away from the fact that we had a real manager.

(THIS PAGE) JEN ROSENSTEIN; (OPPOSITE PAGE) REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (FIRE); GUS STEWART/REDFERNS (1976); : KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES (2019)

TOP LEFT: A young Gene blows fire during a Kiss gig at Calderone Theater, New York, August 24, 1975.

BOTTOM LEFT: Kiss play London's Hammersmith Odeon on the *Destroyer* tour, May 15, 1976. The tour ushered in a new era in the band's theatrical presentation, which has continued to evolve ever since.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Paul and Gene backstage in Los Angeles, May 31, 1974.

TOP RIGHT: Gene performs on the End of the Road world tour at the Forum, in Inglewood, California, February 16, 2019.

RICHARD CREAMER/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (1974)

Bill Aucoin was a very important part of the creative vision, and so was Sean Delaney. I'm not sure who came up with the idea for the risers, but we continue to use that idea even today.

December 2nd at Madison Square Garden is the last Kiss show ever. During the last song, which will surely be "Rock and Roll All Nite," what emotions will be running through you? Do you feel you'll have a hard time keeping it together?

Yes. I can glibly sit here and talk about how I'll be feeling for our last show, but I'm sure it's going to be a different kind of a thing, and much deeper. I mean, what a journey it's been! What a trip!

What are you going to miss the most when it's over? I feel that Paul will be able to deal with it a little better. I think it's going to be harder for you.

I feel like George Lucas, where you helped create this thing that becomes not just movies and stuff but a culture. Like, when you go to Comic Con or Star Wars conventions, people dress up and it's how you look, how you walk, how you talk. We created a culture with Kiss. And after Lucas sold to Disney, that doesn't mean it goes away. You can see the vestiges, the conventions and the TV shows that continue on, and we intend on keeping Kiss going, but simply not as a touring band, and that comes out of pride.

So you're thinking the December 2nd Madison Square Garden concert will be Kiss's last show ever?

Yes, it will be the last Kiss show of all time. We're not going to put on the makeup and put on shows anywhere. We have too much respect for what we've been able to accomplish, and every member that's been in the band deserves a slice of the accolades. That includes [*former guitarists*] Mark St. John and even Vinnie Vincent, no matter how much trouble he caused us, or anguish. Everybody contributed to this thing and they have a right to be proud, because it takes goddamn hard work. If you think it's just about putting makeup on your face and you can have a 50-year career, boy, are you dreaming.

50 YEARS OF KISS

GOD OF PLUNDER

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEN SHARP

Kiss put **John 5** on his guitar journey. Along the way, he's amassed one of the most enviable collections of the band's memorabilia in the world.

FROM HIS SOLO work to his stints with Marilyn Manson, Rob Zombie and Mötley Crüe, John 5 has been hailed as a modern-day guitar hero. Through the years, he's also had the opportunity to work with the original members of Kiss. John appears on Paul Stanley's *Live to Win* album, performing on songs that include "Where Angels Dare," which he co-wrote with Stanley and Desmond Child. He also shows up on Ace Frehley's *Origins Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* releases, and he enlisted Peter Criss to play drums on "Georgia on My Mind," from John 5 and the Creatures' 2021 album, *Sinner*. It all results from a fascination with the group that began in his youth.

"It was spring of 1977 and I was walking through Sears when I saw the *Love Gun* display," John recalls of an early encounter with the group's music. "I loved monsters, and I was like, 'I've got to have this record!' I went home and I put it on, and it changed my life forever. It was such an epiphany. It's the same thing that happened for people watching the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Kiss made millions of people want to pick up an instrument and play guitar, play drums, sing and write songs, and that's why we have certain guitar players and musicians today. Kiss definitely did that for me."

John's love of the group eventually led him to amass one of the biggest collections of Kiss memorabilia in the world, which includes many unique items. "I always had that collective soul," he explains. "When I was a kid, I would go to Toys R Us and I would get all of the Kiss things: the puzzles, the dolls, the remote-control van, the notebooks. It just made me happy.

"But collecting now is very important, because it's preserving rock and roll history. All this stuff could be thrown away or packed up when you moved away from home and just forgotten about. Having pieces like the songbooks, album displays, concert posters and T-shirts is important to me. Kiss changed the lives of millions of kids, me being one of them. And to see people's eyes light up when they see certain things, it's very important to me and important to others, and that's why I do it."

What are some of the holy grail items you've been able to track down?

Costume pieces are always very important, and the one-of-a-kind, early costume pieces are especially wonderful. I have unique items, like a [*stained-glass Kiss-themed*] *Monopoly* game presented to them in the '70s, and very early posters and flyers, as well as weird merchandise from other countries. I have historic items, like the "Great Kiss Off" banner

In his home in Los Angeles, John 5 shows off his extraordinary collection of Kiss memorabilia, which includes highly prized '70s-era costume pieces.

TOP LEFT: John holds Paul Stanley's leather-and-studs costume belt, seen on the cover of 1974's *Hotter Than Hell* and subsequent tours. Gene Simmons' original 1974 costume is in the glass case to his left.

TOP RIGHT: John poses with parts of Ace Frehley's *Dynasty/Unmasked* costume.

BOTTOM LEFT: This 1974 "Great Kiss Off" banner is among the rare one-offs in John's collection.

BOTTOM MIDDLE: John holds the first homemade Kiss glitter logo T-shirt, circa 1973.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A 1979 Bally Kiss pinball machine sits among rare promotional in-store mobiles and standups.

[*from a 1974 promotion for the group's debut album, held in a suburban Chicago mall*] and the Kiss Army poster. Much of this is stuff you will probably never see again, and once it's gone, it's gone. And that's what I don't want to happen.

Let's talk about a few of your rarest pieces, starting with the first Kiss T-shirt.
When they were just getting started, they were making their own homemade T-shirts during the [*New York*] club days at the Daisy [*in Amityville, New York*], Hotel Diplomat and the Coventry. I got that shirt from their manager Bill Aucoin. That's just history right there. There's not many of those.

I also have a large collection of T-shirts spanning their career up until 1983. There are T-shirts in here from the early, early shows, where they only sold a few shirts. There are pajamas, JCPenney Kiss clothes, jackets, sweat suits — things people don't know ever existed.

You have Gene's first costume.
The earliest I've seen him wear this black outfit was April of '74 and there's only one of them. It's on the cover of the *Hotter Than Hell* album, and it's in a zillion pictures and concerts. Gene told me he only had the one outfit back then, so he would take the utmost care with it. It's just one of the most iconic pieces. There's even a skull on the back of it. It used to be on the front, but Gene cut it out so he could breathe — that suit is made of thick leather. He then put the skull on the back.

"MUCH OF THIS IS STUFF YOU WILL PROBABLY NEVER SEE IT AGAIN. AND ONCE IT'S GONE, IT'S GONE"

You have Paul's belt from his stage costume from 1974.
Yes, he's wearing it on the cover of *Hotter Than Hell*, and he wore it in tons of concerts. During that period, costume-wise, that was pretty much all that Paul wore — he wore Spandex and that belt. Those early '74 pieces are very special, because there's only one of them.

Are you still on the lookout for any important items?
To be honest, there are certain things I'm missing, so anything that comes along gives me such joy and excitement. And I think that's what this is all about to me. It's about having that nostalgia and that joy and excitement.

SIX BY 5

John picks his favorite Paul Stanley solos.

WHETHER TEARING UP the fretboard with Marilyn Manson, Rob Zombie or Mötley Crüe, John 5 is recognized as one of this generation's most groundbreaking guitar players. Given his six-string mojo and his cred as one of the most dedicated foot soldiers in the Kiss Army, we asked him to lend his expert opinion on six of his favorite Paul Stanley solos.

"HOLD ME, TOUCH ME"
PAUL STANLEY — *PAUL STANLEY* (1978)

"The 'Hold Me, Touch Me' solo is one of my favorites because of the emotion and the slow hand vibrato, and that's hard to do. Sometimes playing fast is easier to do than playing something with beautiful emotion and a slow hand vibrato that'll just tear your heart out. It might be my favorite part of the song."

"SURE KNOW SOMETHING"
KISS — *DYNASTY* (1979)

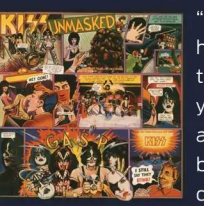
"Listening to these solos, you can really tell when it's Ace and when it's Paul, and I think that's so cool. With 'Sure Know Something,' you can tell that this is planned out and this solo was written around these certain chord structures. It's not just someone improvising, and that's what I really like about it."

John 5 with the original *Village Voice* newspaper ad for Kiss's August 24 and 25, 1973 shows at the Daisy, Long Island, and a flyer for their Daisy shows on April 13 and 14, 1973.

"EASY AS IT SEEMS"
KISS — *UNMASKED* (1980)

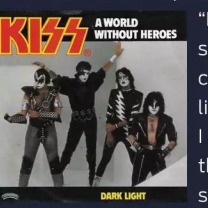
"This is one of my favorite songs from *Unmasked*. For this song, Paul took the approach of a rock and roll solo over this rock-pop disco beat, and I really think it's an amazing juxtaposition."

"YOU'RE ALL THAT I WANT"
KISS — *UNMASKED* (1980)



"We're so used to hearing Ace that when these solos come in you think, This must be a session player, because it sounds so different. This solo is mature and sounds like Steve Lukather or something from a Steely Dan record. We know Paul loves Zeppelin and bands with cool guitar players, but it doesn't sound like that."

"A WORLD WITHOUT HEROES"
KISS — *MUSIC FROM "THE ELDER"* (1981)



"It's a beautiful melodic solo, with the perfect choice of notes. It's not like, 'Let's see what I can improvise over this.' This solo is sophisticated, and the note choices couldn't be more perfect."

"JUST A BOY"
KISS — *MUSIC FROM "THE ELDER"* (1981)

"Listening to these solos, we can start to see Paul's formula. And it works perfectly, because he's playing to the song. You can tell he's a songwriter and a guitar player that knows what to do and what not to do for the song. I would have played something totally different that probably wouldn't have fit as well. But Paul shows you don't have to be a shredder to be an incredible guitar player. This is sophisticated songwriting and playing."

STAR TURN

Kelley Deal was a drummer who wanted to play lead guitar. She got her chance on the Breeders' 1993 Platinum-seller, *Last Splash*. Thirty years on, she reflects on making an alt-rock masterpiece.

BY TOM BEAUJOUR

WHEN PIXIES BASSIST Kim Deal asked her twin sister, Kelley, to join the Breeders, a side project that she had started with Tanya Donelly of Throwing Muses in 1989, Kelley was not particularly surprised. In fact, it was a reunion that was long overdue. "We grew up playing music together, so it seemed completely normal to me and her that she would have me involved," Kelley says. "Drums were my first instrument, and Kim and Charles [*Pixies frontman Black Francis*] actually split the ticket for me to go to Boston to be the drummer for the Pixies. I wasn't an active drummer at that time, and when I heard the songs I was like, I can't do that gig. They need a real drummer."

Kim had also reached out to Kelley when the Breeders made the recordings for their first album, 1990's *Pod*, with producer Steve Albini.

WENN RIGHTS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"She asked me if I wanted to go, but I couldn't get off of work for it. I think I was working for Litton Computer Services, which is a defense contractor in Dayton, Ohio, where we're from." When the Breeders were preparing to record 1992's *Safari* EP, Kim once again approached Kelley about joining her in the band, and Kelley this time made the jump. "Kim asked me what I wanted to play; the choice was open. I didn't say guitar, I didn't say rhythm guitar, I didn't say bass guitar. I said lead guitar. I wanted to play the star."

The Breeders would tour extensively in 1992, including a slot at that year's Redding Festival and a run supporting Nirvana, and would enter the studio in early 1993 to make their second full-length, *Last Splash*, with many of the songs already road tested and demoed. Still, Kelley was relatively new to the guitar and to the exigencies of the recording process. "When we recorded *Last Splash*, every single person there — with the exception of our drummer, Jim Macpherson — could play guitar better than I could. At any time, they could have taken the instrument and been like, 'Okay, that's fine. All right. Okay. Let me just do it real quick.' They could have made the decision, 'We don't have the time or the patience.' But they never did. And it makes all the difference, because then you have ownership over your parts and the record, and you feel proud about stuff."

Released in August 1993, *Last Splash* would go Platinum on the strength of its hit single, "Cannonball," but it is anything but a conventionally commercial album. An exercise in contrasts — where catchy riffs and sweet melodies are jostled by squealing guitars and other disquieting noises — it's the rare album that somehow manages to sound as satisfying as it does strange. "It's a really lovely art piece, and it seems like a complete thought," Kelley says. "And whenever I think about the record, I like to consider us an art band, because we do have weird sounds and weird moments and lots of empty spaces. A lot of the time, what you don't play is more important than what you actually do play."

Kelley (left) and Kim Deal perform with the Breeders on *MTV Live and Loud*, opening for Nirvana, December 1993.

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the album's release, the Breeders have released a new deluxe edition of *Last Splash* and have been performing the record live in its entirety. *Guitar Player* caught up with Kelley Deal on the Breeders' bus, just as the celebratory tour was getting underway.

Beyond it being very cool, was there a musical rationale behind your request to play lead guitar in the Breeders?
Yeah, Jimmy Page in [*the 1976 concert film*] *The Song Remains the Same*. That blew my little prosaic mind of what a lead guitar could be. It was soundscape — an art project.

Once you decided to be the lead guitarist, did you then develop a practice regimen?
Did I sit down and learn how to play scales? No. Had I done that, I would've obviously been a more proficient guitarist, but I would also have been a different guitarist. Even today, with what little I do know, I have to remind myself — especially on songs that we recorded back then, like "Hag" — not to do the little string-wiggle vibrato. I have to just let that note lay there, and back off of it and keep that vulnerability and sincerity. It's got to just be those notes, and then leave. My narrator is not a jammer.

The guitar is so physical and muscle-memory–based that once you develop patterns, it can completely limit you. Your hand is playing you.
You've got to really work at getting out of that. Even today, when I write or do anything for my other band, R. Ring, my partner in that, Mike Montgomery, often talks about "the claw" — the hand shape you typically use on the neck. It's the same claw that you always make. I'll just change the tuning on my guitar so that when I do my claw, it produces different notes and sounds than if it was tuned in standard. Then it's like, "Oh see, that's not something I would typically play."

In addition to Page, were you inspired by

The Breeders circa 1993. (from left) Kim and Kelley Deal, drummer Jim Macpherson and bassist Josephine Wiggs.

KEVIN WESTENBERG

"I DIDN'T SAY RHYTHM GUITAR, I DIDN'T SAY BASS GUITAR. I SAID LEAD GUITAR. I WANTED TO PLAY THE STAR"

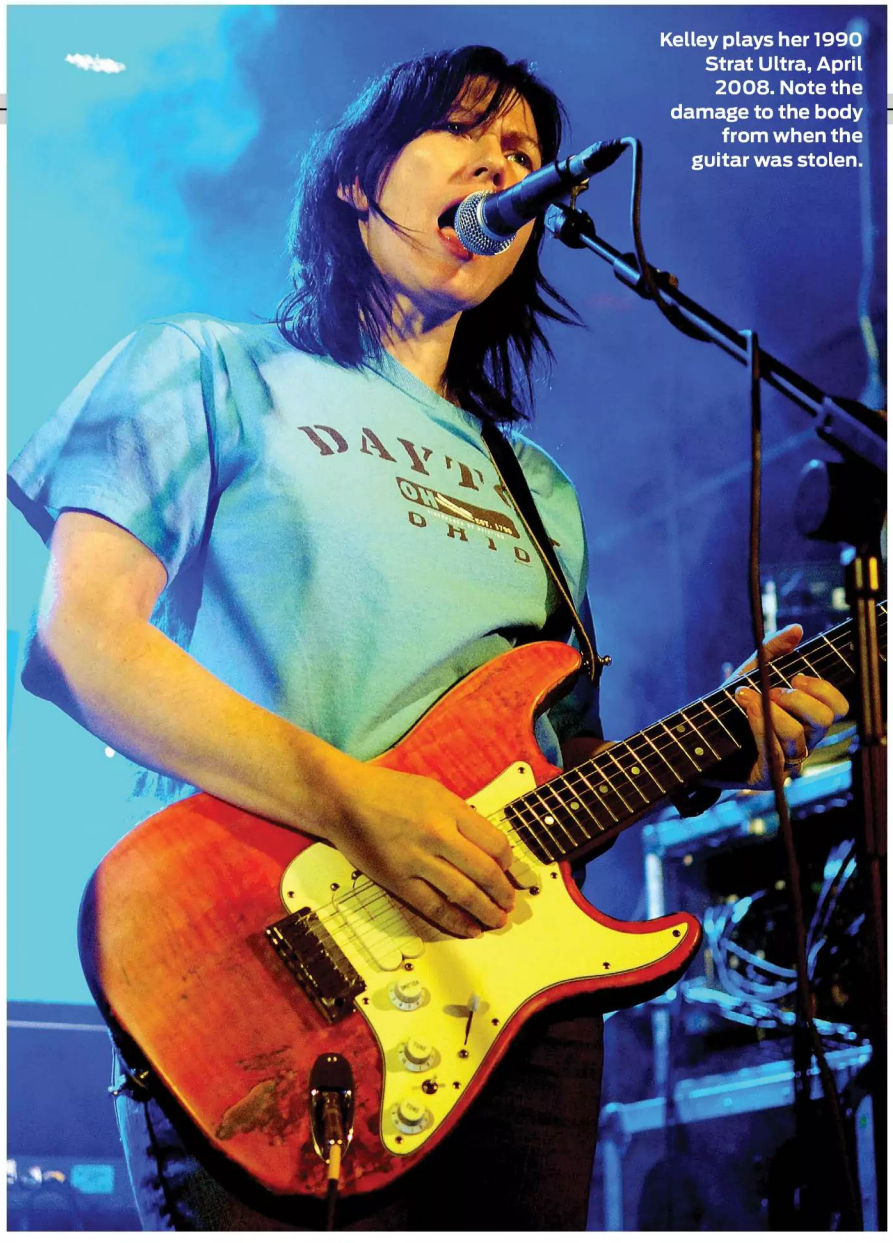
any other more alternative guitarists?
Andy Gill from Gang of Four, for sure, because that was another revelation for me. It was the anti-blues. It's so easy to go into blues-based rock or blues-based lead playing, and I really try not to. And the tone was so different. It was so abrasive and ugly.

"Cannonball" was a huge hit song for the band. Was there any sense while you were recording the album that it had a special commercial potential?
We knew it was cool and stuff, but I don't know if many people remember that at that time, on alternative radio or college radio, that was not what was being played. It was jangly stuff, like R.E.M. This was a very noisy, noisy track, and the arrangement is weird. Nothing repeats the same amount. The guitars stop, the drums stop. The lead guitar does not shred or do anything. It just does that hook. And the main guitar is a distorted acoustic. It was just a very weird track.

The sliding guitar hook on "Cannonball" must be challenging to play evenly and smoothly.
We actually had to tape some of the strings that I wasn't using. To get that part loud enough and compressed enough, you can't have any string dangle. It's a dry, warm tone — a nice jazzy, George Benson kind of thing — and I played on the fifth fret of the D and the G. When we play the song live, I use a boost on that part, and I turn the reverb up a little. But that's a tough one to get creamy enough versus just loud.

When listening closely to *Last Splash*, particularly on headphones, it's noticeable how much attention is given to the "noise" elements of the record. They're perfectly timed for dramatic effect. They pan, they mute. it's really elaborate.
Every single note, squiggle and squeal has been curated for the listener. And I think what's so great about the record is that it doesn't sound like that. So much sounds accidental, and of course, some things were, but they were accidental and then left in. There was a lot of accidental stuff that was not left in too. But the end result is that it doesn't sound overworked; it sounds natural. It sounds like a bunch of people got in the studio and just did it. And that's not it at all.

For the end of "New Year," for example, I went out into the live room and just made all kinds of sounds — reverb, squeals, whines, moans — and then we put that to quarter-inch tape. We fed the tape into the machine and then meticulously went through it: You hear a squeal, and then you mark it, and you write *squeal*. And then there's a nice bit of feedback, and you write *feedback*. You keep doing that, and you isolate these sounds that are interesting. Then we unloaded the tape, cut it, and made little piles of blips, feedback, whatever. Our co-producer, Mark Freegard, taped all that together, some



Kelley plays her 1990 Strat Ultra, April 2008. Note the damage to the body from when the guitar was stolen.

of it backward, and that's the piece that you hear.

What were the main guitars on the record?
Mainly my Strat Ultra, and then I used Kim's goldtop Les Paul, because I didn't have a Les Paul at that time. Kim also had her Strat and her acoustics. A lot of songs have acoustic run through distortion as the main rhythm guitar. We really didn't have a deep pocket of guitars, but our engineer, Andy Taub at Coast in San Francisco, knew Chuck Prophet from [*the Tucson-based alt-country/neopsychedelic group*] Green on Red, and he brought over a ton of equipment, like the mandolin I play on "Drivin' on 9." That really helped us.

And as far as amps and pedals go?
Kim and I used the Marshall JCM900s that we still use to this day. I love those so much. Every time I play something else, I just want to get back to my JCM900. I'm so happy about it because of the channel switching. It's a workhorse, and it's a beautiful pedal platform. I also had this great Montgomery Ward amp that I found in a pawn shop. It has great tremolo on it, and that's what you're hearing any time there's that effect on the record, like on Kim's vocal on "Mad Lucas." I had to go out and get a tremolo pedal after making the record to replicate those sounds. As far as pedals go, I think I just had an orange Boss DS-1, a digital delay and maybe my Ibanez Tube King. The reverb on my JCM900 still worked back then, so I didn't need a pedal for that.

Your Strat Ultra was stolen. What happened?
That was my very first electric guitar. It was a gift from my sister for Christmas, and I just about died when it was stolen. We played a show in 1991, in Olympia, Washington, and I sat my guitar down on the stand and I turned my body to walk off. And before anybody knew it, a kid, who was maybe 11 or 12 years old, jumped onstage, grabbed my guitar, and went out the back. Some members of Nirvana and their crew were there and they asked for the serial number of the guitar and said, "We'll to keep our eyes open." [*Although many online sources say Deal's Strat Ultra is a 1992 model, it appears to be of 1990 vintage, with serial number N988911. While N9 serial numbers designate a Fender guitar of 1999 manufacture, the company inadvertently affixed a number of those preprinted decals to some 1990 models, according to support.fender.com.*]

About a year later, I got a phone call from one of the crew people. The guitar had surfaced in a store and the serial number had been on a list, so they were notified. I sent the store some money and they shipped my guitar back. The finish was stripped, and it was done with a hammer and a chisel, and then this weird green automotive paint was on some of it. But the serial number was perfect! I never got the guitar fixed because it had gone through a trauma. And I needed to respect that.

"IT'S GOT TO JUST BE THOSE NOTES, AND THEN LEAVE. MY NARRATOR IS NOT A JAMMER"

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BEYOND DJANGO

A gypsy jazz child prodigy, **Biréli Lagrène** grew to master a range of styles. On *Solo Suites* and *Plays Loulou Gasté*, he lets his spontaneous flights of musical fancy soar.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

BIRÉLI LAGRÈNE IS one of the most accomplished jazz guitarists of the past four decades, yet his playing still radiates a boyish wonder and curiosity. I caught his recent show at Freight & Salvage in Berkeley, California, in a duo setting with fellow phenom Martin Taylor, where Lagrène displayed sheer playful virtuosity. His plucking thumb alone is a marvel and could practically do a gig by itself. When supporting Taylor, Biréli would add an octave effect and become a badass bassist with deep pockets. When at the fore, his ability to casually throw in outrageously advanced licks or crazy chords for utter amusement brought Jeff Beck and Tommy Emmanuel to mind. The audience was full of cats smiling to themselves, shaking their heads in disbelief and occasionally laughing out loud in admiration at his total command of the strings.

To longtime readers and jazz fans, this is not headline news, but somehow Lagrène has remained somewhat under the radar — an oddity, considering his ridiculous resume. As a child prodigy, the French maestro was immediately recognized as a premier purveyor of authentic gypsy jazz. He achieved international stardom in his early teens with the release of his 1980 album, *Routes to Django*. But unlike the handful of guitarists who master Django Reinhardt's style to a high degree, only to be pigeonholed, Lagrène spread his wings, touring with Al Di Meola, Paco de Lucia and John McLaughlin. He evolved into a master of myriad electric and acoustic styles by listening to rock and experimenting with fusion, collaborating with icons that include Larry Coryell, violinist Jean-Luc Ponty and bassists Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius.

In 2022, Lagrène unveiled a guitar gem, *Solo Suites* (Peewee!), where the full spectrum of his experience is evidenced intimately, in delicate detail. It's essentially a master class in solo acoustic jazz. The album's 17 tracks range from the pensive opener, "Memories," to the inquisitive arpeggiated explorations of "Question Response," the galloping percussive adventure of "Caravan" and the swaggering swing of "Blue Blues." Lagrène brings a palpable sense of joy to the music, and he clearly relishes being completely unbridled to follow his fingers wherever they feel like going. Spontaneous and in the moment, his playing never lets you anticipate what's coming around the next corner.

Lagrène has a new release focused mainly on the French-speaking parts of the world, *Biréli Lagrène Plays Loulou Gasté* (Dreyfus). The album finds him in a gypsy jazz context, backed by upright bass and drums as he pays tribute to the celebrated French composer. Gasté composed "Pour Toi" ("For You") in 1956, which was re-imagined in English by singer Morris Albert in the mid '70s as "Feelings." The soft-sational tune became so ubiquitous that anyone from the era can identify it upon hearing the first two notes. Lagrène renders an inspired instrumental take full of fabulous cascading lead work on his Loulou Gasté tribute, but as he went on to explain in a Zoom call from his French home, that album is more of a side project. Besides, the guitarist is still jazzed up at how *Solo Suites* turned out.

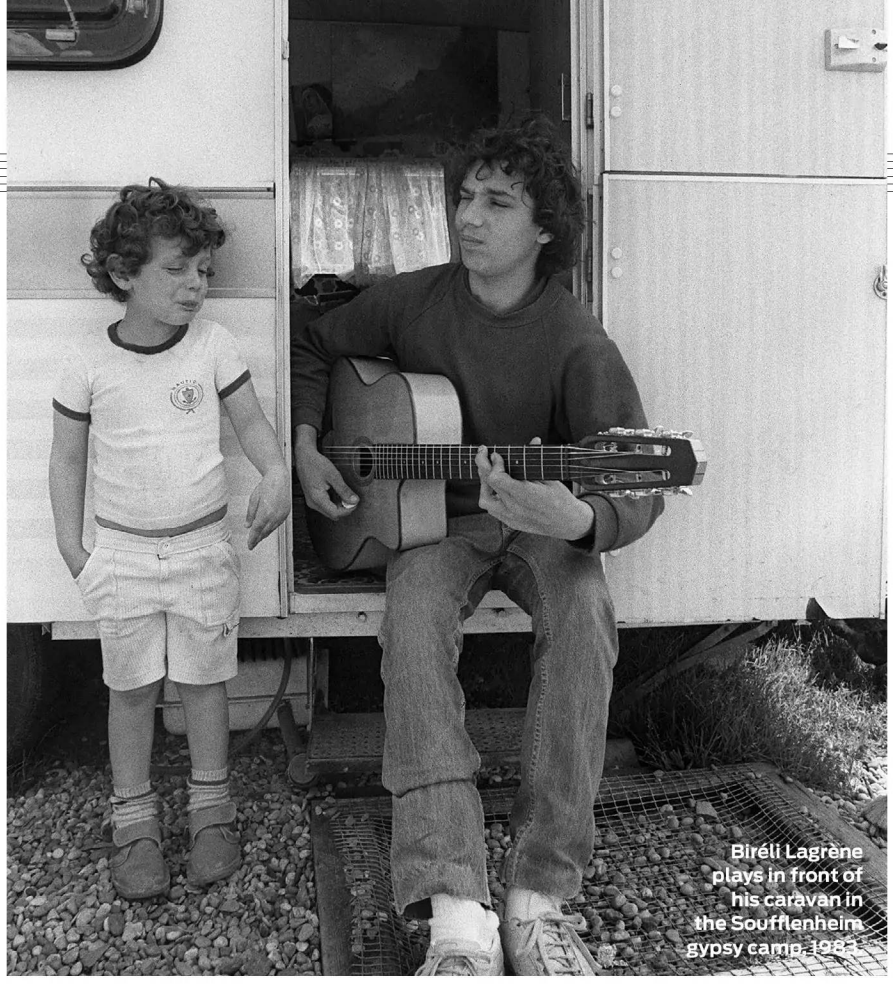
Is there anything that makes you feel more at home and inspired than playing solo acoustic?

I guess not. Everything feels so comfortable all of a sudden. It's a weird feeling. When I play alone on the acoustic guitar, most of the things I do are improvised. That's exactly the way I approached *Solo Suites*. I didn't prepare much before I walked into the studio. I preferred to surprise myself. I'm usually well prepared when I play with my band, but I didn't feel that urge. I wanted to give it as much air as possible and see what would happen. The whole thing could have gone wrong, but I took the risk and got lucky.

Even from a compositional standpoint?

Everything happened on the spot, other than the three or four standards. Otherwise, I had no clue at all. I had to come up with names for the tunes after I recorded them, and that was the hardest part, finding the right name with the right atmosphere.

"Question Response" is appropriately named because you seem to pose a



Biréli Lagrène plays in front of his caravan in the Soufflenheim gypsy camp, 1983.

question using arpeggios and then answer with a percussive response. But your percussive approach comes from a completely different place than most. Can you explain?

I also play a lot of electric bass, and a lot of my percussive technique on the acoustic comes from slap bass. I don't move my hands around all over the guitar; I keep them very close to the fretboard and strings. I get the percussive sounds from hammering on to the fretboard with my left hand and slapping the strings with my right.

On the gig with Martin Taylor and on "Blue Blues" from Solo Suites, you employ an octave effect on the lower notes to sound like an electric bass, while the higher notes remain pure for chords and melodies. How do you do that?

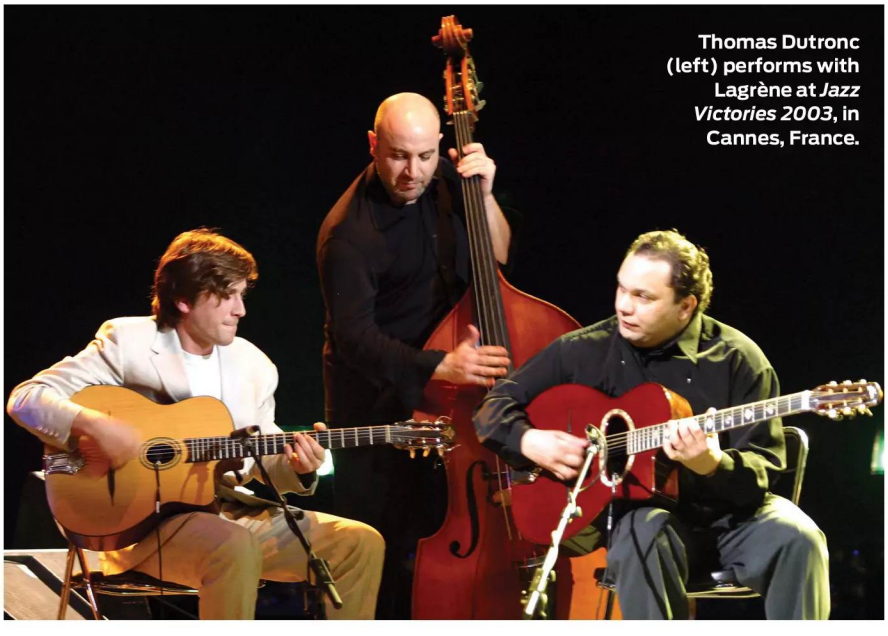
I use a Boss OC-3 Super Octave pedal, on which they have this great trick called Poly mode. You can set that so it only adds the lower octave effect to the lower notes you play on the fifth and sixth strings, while the top four remain free of the effect. It's miraculous for a player such as myself that loves bass. It's been around for a while, but many guitar players are unaware that the Super Octave has this option. Suddenly it provides that dimension, and everything becomes bigger.

You come from the gypsy jazz tradition, which is very much about pick playing, yet you're very accomplished playing with your thumb. How about full fingerstyle?

I'm a very poor fingerstyle player. That's the toughest thing for me. I never got into that because I was so busy playing with a pick all the time, but I do enjoy a lot of playing with just my thumb. I use it for downstrokes and upstrokes, kind of like George Benson, who does that amazingly well.

What's the workhorse guitar on *Solo Suites*?

I play a Flyde steel-string acoustic the whole time. It has an onboard pickup, so I just ran it through the Boss Super Octave for "Blue Blues." I'm not exactly sure of the Flyde model, but it's a production guitar with a Florentine cutaway. It has incredible playability that's like butter, on a very thin neck, and it sounds great. I'd been using it on almost every gig for about five years leading up to *Solo Suites*. It's on the back burner now as I've been touring with an archtop. [*According to Roger Bucknall, who is celebrating 50 years since he founded Flyde Guitars (fyldeguitars.com) in England, "Biréli's guitar is a custom Falstaff with a cutaway shallow body and a Sitka spruce top rather than our usual Engelmann. It's fitted with a Baggs StagePro pickup. We made the first of these for Adam Palma, who was playing with Biréli and with Al Di Meola at the time, and both of them went on to order the same model."*]



Thomas Dutronc (left) performs with Lagrène at *Jazz Victories 2003*, in Cannes, France.

JEAN-CLAUDE DELMAS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (1983); JEAN BAPTISTE LACROIX/WIREIMAGE (2003)

Lagrène plays a Gibson Super V BJB archtop, 2000.

ANDREW LEPLEY/REDFERNS

"WHEN I PLAY THOSE ARPEGGIATED RUNS, I THINK LIKE A CLASSICAL VIOLINIST PLAYING A CONCERTO"

Does the archtop appeal to you because it's kind of in between an acoustic and an electric?

Yeah, and I keep going back and forth between solidbodies and archtops on the electric side. Right now, I'm playing a Benedetto. I had been collaborating on ideas with Fibonacci Guitars, but that didn't wind up working out in time for the tour. I was desperate when I called up Benedetto, and the CEO, Howard Paul, flew up from Savannah, Georgia, to where I was in Michigan with two guitars for me to try. I've been enjoying the 16-B model.

It's interesting to hear you switch guitars and styles. For example, when you played a Django tune on the archtop, it came across much more straight ahead. And playing a gypsy guitar on the Loulou Gasté material takes it to another 'tweener spot, between steel-string and nylon-string acoustic.

I'm always kind of an in-between guy. And yeah, it's interesting to see how the guitar sound can affect a player. I know it affects me a lot. Whatever instrument I play, I have to go toward how that guitar plays and the sound it produces. I have to sneak myself in there somehow.

And now you're doing so while paying tribute to Loulou Gasté. Was he known more as a composer who played some guitar, rather than as a guitarist?

Actually, I think he was a pretty good guitar player who was known in the '40s because he played with Django sometimes. They were very good friends. He became famous for his compositions, especially "Feelings." It was quoted by another artist who took credit, but Loulou got the rights back. It became so famous and is still amazing.

But I honestly don't know that much about it, and I almost consider the album not exactly my own. I'll tell you why. Loulou Gasté's wife, Line Renaud, is a very famous actress, singer and dancer. She's 95 now. She knew Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and was so well known in Las Vegas that a street there bears her name. The album was her idea, and she's so wonderfully nice that I had no choice but to accept. I found out later that it was one of Loulou's greatest wishes. She told me that her husband loved the way I play gypsy jazz, and that he would have wanted me to do that kind of record with his material. I wanted to show her my respect, and so I hope I did a good thing.

You sound very inspired, and you crush the lead playing on "Feelings" with all those cascading arpeggios. Is Django the inspiration for those?

When I play that kind of music, of course I think in that manner about Django's playing. But there's another thing that adds to it. When I play those arpeggiated runs utilizing the whole length of the neck, I don't think about Django Reinhardt; I start thinking like a classical violinist playing a concerto. I'm very much influenced by that, technically. So that's where it's coming from — running longer arpeggios that span three octaves and all the funny stuff that surrounds it. To me, that sounds more like a violin than a guitar.

It's thrilling to be in an audience going "ooh" and "ahh" as you take them along on that rollercoaster ride up and down the fretboard!

Yeah, I try to use the whole neck. What the heck. [*laughs*]

A big fan at the Freight & Salvage show claimed you have one of Django's guitars that was gifted to you by Les Paul. Any truth to that?

Well, maybe some false echoes. When Django came to New York in 1946, he was playing with Duke Ellington, and Les Paul came to one of the shows because he loved Django. He gave Les the guitar he came with, which was a Selmer. I believe that guitar is still in the possession of Les Paul's family.

The guitar I play is made by a French maker, Jean Barault, who builds almost exclusively in that style. His guitars are amazing. When I need one, he builds one for me. He never gives me one that is already in stock. You can't get any closer to an original Selmer. He had a chance to take the measurements of Django's original, the last Selmer guitar he played, which is in a Paris museum. So my guitar has the exact same measurements as Django's guitar.

What's the most crucial element to a great gypsy jazz acoustic?

The top. You don't want it to be too stiff. Mine is very thin and quite fragile.

That's probably what makes it sound much better, because the low notes are amazingly natural, and they really come through. The problem with gypsy guitars generally is that they tend to sound very much focused in the middle range, which I rather don't prefer. But my Barault sounds very rich, and I believe it has to do with the braces inside the top.

Can you elaborate?
Selmer made a few guitars — Django probably had one — where they would leave out one or two of the braces. I'm not an expert on this, but that's probably the trick, because some of those guitars sound especially good, and mine is like one of those. It's still very young. I've only had it for maybe three or four years now. It sounded incredible when it was still green, and it just sounds better and better with age.

You're such an interesting player because you play many different types of guitars. If you had a gig on Mars and could only bring one, which would it be?
An acoustic, so I would be able to hear myself. [*laughs*]

You were a child prodigy, of which there seem to be many these days on YouTube, but few that develop a real career. What's the key to getting past the novelty of child prodigy and into a meaningful life in music?
It's hard to say, but I'm glad you mentioned that. I started when I was three or four years old, and it was a different era. I loved what I did. That doesn't mean they don't love what they do now, but it was always clear to me that I wanted to become a musician for a living, gigging and going on tour, not simply playing in my bedroom or thinking of the guitar as some kind of toy. And it should never become a routine. Once it becomes a routine, you're done. It's like going to work in the office and every morning becomes the same thing. Being a guitar player should always remain a joy. The result is simple: I'm still here doing it and enjoying it as much as when I first touched the guitar.

"IT SHOULD NEVER BECOME A ROUTINE. BEING A GUITAR PLAYER SHOULD ALWAYS REMAIN A JOY"

Lagrène performs with Adam Palma (left), both of whom are playing Fylde guitars.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM PALMA

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Brian May

THE GREATEST GUITAR MOMENTS OF 1973

Revisiting a monster year for classic album releases, 50 years later.

BY JEFF JACOBSON

FOLK ICON BOB DYLAN went electric in 1965. Jimi Hendrix's incendiary version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" electrified Woodstock in 1969, and Kurt Cobain's suicide would be rock's biggest story of 1994. While 1973 may not have a singularly defining music-related event like these, the year heralded the release of a staggering number of classic albums. It's almost impossible to fathom, but Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy*, the Who's *Quadrophenia*, and Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* were all issued that year, not to mention debuts from now-legendary rock bands Queen, Aerosmith and Lynyrd Skynyrd. Over the course of 2023, we've dedicated entire lessons to celebrating the guitar wizardry found within *Dark Side*, *Houses* and Skynyrd's debut, *Pronounced 'Lĕh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd*. What better way to close out the year than by paying homage to even more of 1973's greatest guitar moments? So go ahead and grab your axe, because this is going to be fun.

Steely Dan's celebrated discography features some of the greatest session guitar players ever to grace a recording studio. *Countdown to Ecstasy*, released in July 1973, is no exception, as it has plenty of terrific guitar work from Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, Denny Diaz and Rick Derringer (who we'll hear more from later). In "My Old School," Baxter takes quite a few tasty solos, the second of which features a host of sneaky pick, or *pinch*, harmonics. **Ex. 1** brings this moment to mind. Like learning barre chords, being able to execute this type of harmonic is a rite of passage for rock guitarists of all stripes. As you pick a downstroke, allow the side of your thumb to lightly graze the string. If the thumb happens to touch the string at one of the various nodes, the locations of which vary depending on where the note is fretted with the left hand, a

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (BUCKINGHAM); ED PERLSTEIN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (MAY)

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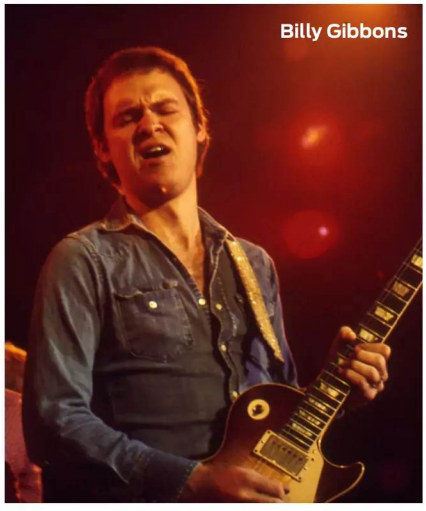
guitarplayer.com/hol23-lesson

harmonic will sound. The sweet spots are typically found in the area over the pickups. You'll want to hunt and peck with the pick along the length of the string in this general area to find the harmonics. Using your guitar's bridge pickup and a high-gain tone will help bring them out.

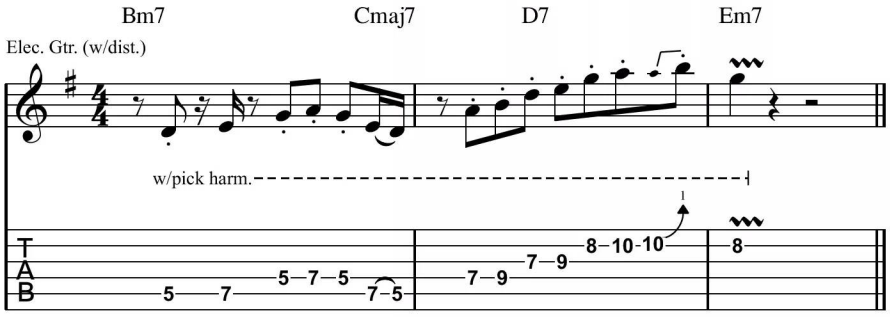
July also brought the release of ZZ Top's *Tres Hombres*, with its classic track "La Grange." The song begins in the key of A, but when guitarist Billy Gibbons begins his killer guitar solo, the band shifts up a minor 3rd (one and one half steps) to the key of C, giving Gibbons' entrance an exciting musical lift and extra bite. Toward the end of the solo, the bearded guitarist employs *hybrid picking* — using a combination of both pick and fingers simultaneously or alternately — to perform a nifty lick, which informs **Ex. 2**. It sounds as if the guitarist is consistently re-sounding each repetition of the two notes, but this would be technically quite difficult at the song's brisk tempo, and it's a relief to find out it's really just an illusion: After


Billy Gibbons

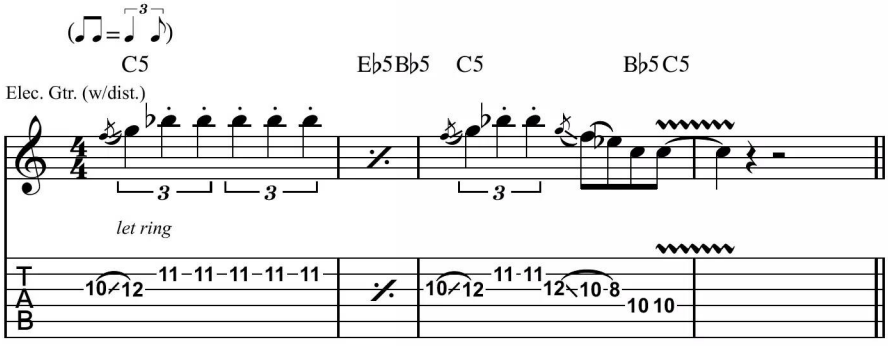
BETH GWINN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

sliding up to the G on the 3rd string, Gibbons lets the note ring while repeatedly plucking the B♭ on the 2nd string with his middle finger. The magic occurs as Gibbons plays each of these notes *staccato* — or short, as indicated by a small dot above — by quickly resting his middle finger on the string's underside immediately after picking it.

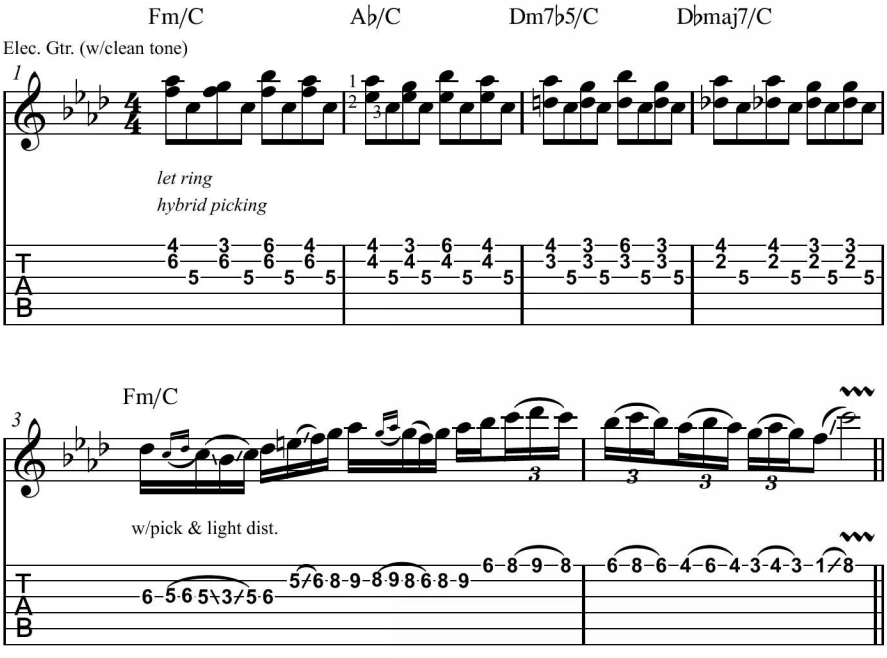
Ex. 1

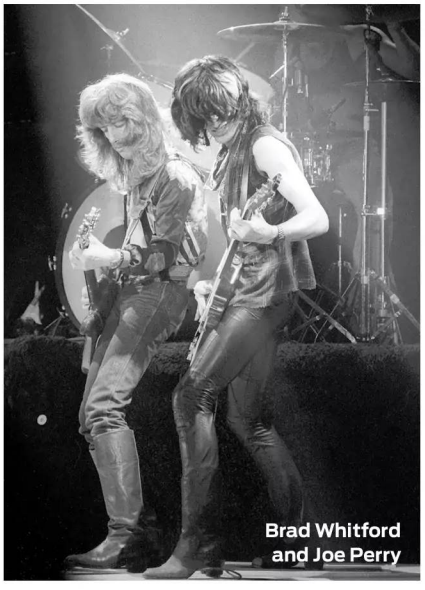


Ex. 2



Ex. 3

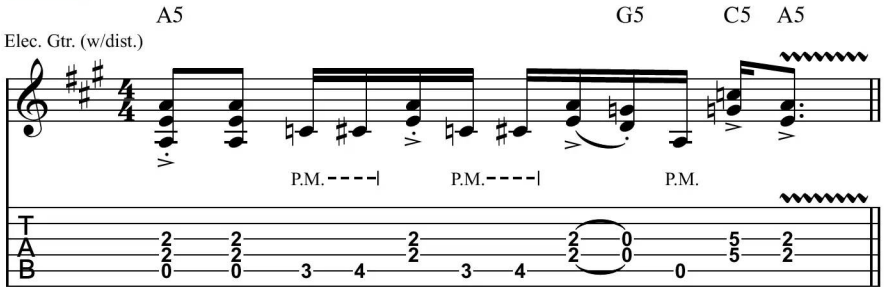



Brad Whitford and Joe Perry

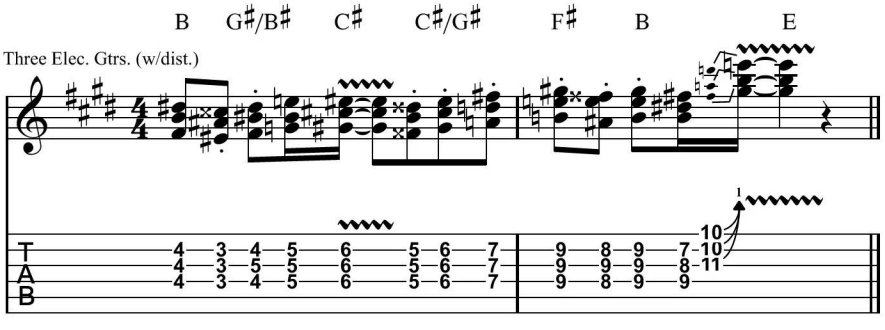
This causes the 3rd string to sound as if it's being re-struck, when it's actually just being left to ring the whole time, peeking through the spaces left by the staccato notes. A cool lick, indeed.

Aerosmith's self-titled debut album, released in January, immediately launched the band into rock superstardom with its first single, "Dream On," a classic power ballad that has been a staple of rock radio ever since. Sounding in the key of F minor, **Ex. 3** is inspired by the song's intro, which has guitarists Joe Perry and Brad Whitford doubling a quasi-Baroque piano part that plays underneath. This figure can be performed either fingerstyle or with a pick, but here you'll want to choose the latter (or employ hybrid picking), so as to be able to pick the single-note line that follows and ends the phrase. Similar to the sinewy run that Perry plays, this line likewise includes notes from the F harmonic minor scale (F, G, A♭, B♭, C, D♭, E). This scale is differentiated from its F natural minor counterpart (F, G, A♭, B♭, C, D♭, E♭) by its raised 7th scale degree, which lends it a more classical flavor. Note the suggested fret-hand fingering in bar 2, and for the very last note, try to execute a classical-style vibrato by wiggling your finger horizontally instead of repeatedly bending the string vertically.

Ex. 4



Ex. 5



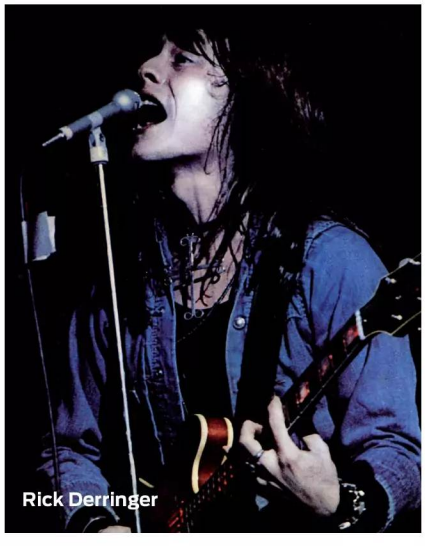
Glam rock also made its presence felt in 1973 with albums from the likes of David Bowie (*Aladdin Sane*) and Alice Cooper (*Billion Dollar Babies*). In addition, guitarist Rick Derringer, who first made his mark on the music world in the 1960s with the band the McCoys ("Hang On Sloopy"), released his hard-driving first solo album, *All American Boy*, in October. It yielded the top-30 hit "Rock and Roll, Hoochie Koo," a high-energy rocker that blazes from start to finish. Derringer has quite a few great moments in the song, one being how he deftly combines palm-muted single notes with stinging dyads in the chorus' drama-filled rhythm part. **Ex. 4** brings this section to mind. Derringer's signature aggressive touch and delivery packs quite an percussive punch, so to emulate it in our in-the-style-of example, use consecutive downstroke jabs, and keep an eye out for staccato dots and accent markings.

Coincidentally, along with Aerosmith, Queen released their self-titled debut that very same July. A hallmark of the British band's sound is their extensive use of harmonized vocal and guitar melodies composed by Freddie Mercury and Brian May, respectively. While other guitarists have employed harmonized parts, few took it as far — or made it as much a signature part of their style — as May, who created complex interludes often with five or more guitar tracks. Queen's first single, "Keep Yourself Alive," features just such an interlude, chock full of darting guitar harmonies spiriting along with a heretofore unheard-of mix of blues rock, early jazz and barbershop quartet. (For an in-depth look at how to create lead guitar harmonies, check out my lesson dedicated to Boston guitarist Tom Scholz in the February 2023 issue.) **Ex. 5** is reminiscent of May's playing in this and many other Queen songs. In the standard music notation, all three guitars are indicated in single-stemmed fashion, and in the tab each guitar is assigned to an individual string. While it's possible to play all the parts on one guitar, doing so with the required

LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

distorted tone will result in a muddy blurring of the melodic lines, due to the interaction and interference among the prominent harmonics involved. Layering individually recorded single-note tracks eliminates this issue and produces a bright, singing clarity.

Acoustic music also made some big waves in '73. Before being invited to join Fleetwood Mac the following year, guitarist Lindsey Buckingham and vocalist Stevie Nicks first made themselves known with their album *Buckingham Nicks*. Lindsey is both a prodigious acoustic and electric guitarist, and is renowned for his fingerstyle prowess, eschewing the use of a pick on either instrument. Throughout the *Buckingham Nicks* track "Frozen Love," his acoustic guitar is tuned to what could be considered open E9sus4 tuning (low to high: E, B, D, F♯, A, D), and his dreamy solo guitar interlude that begins at 2:41 into the track is one of the song's highlights. Here he employs *Travis picking*, a fingerstyle pattern featuring alternating downbeat bass notes popularized by country-and-western



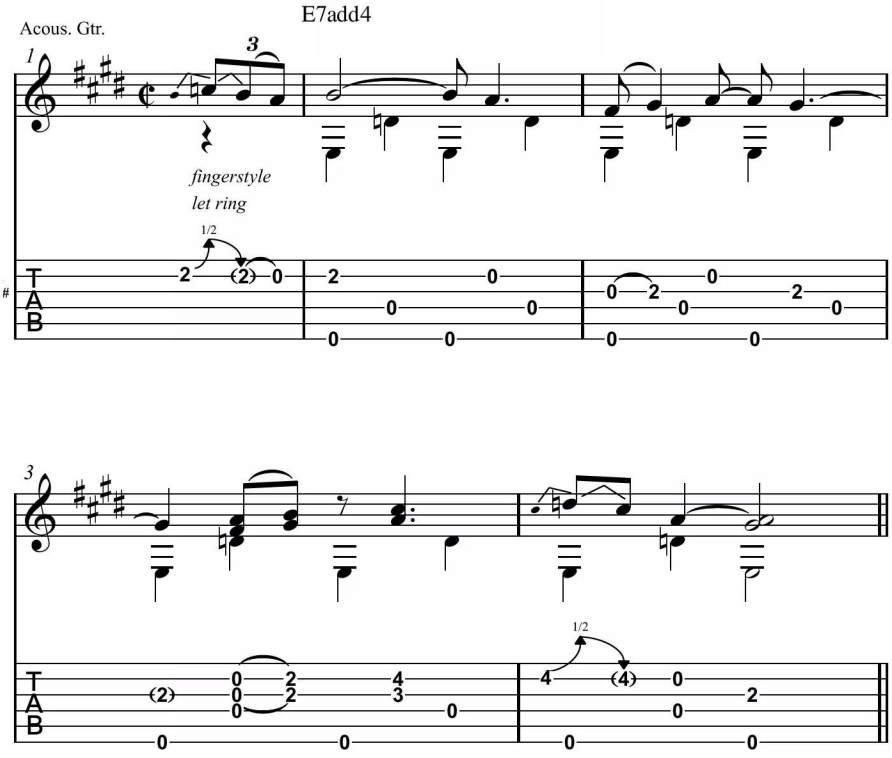
Rick Derringer

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

legend Merle Travis. While performing it, Buckingham keeps a steady pulse, with his unique tuning allowing for some gorgeous interplay between the ringing notes. He even incorporates some string bending, adding another colorful element to the proceedings. In

Ex. 6

Open E9sus4 tuning



Ex. 7

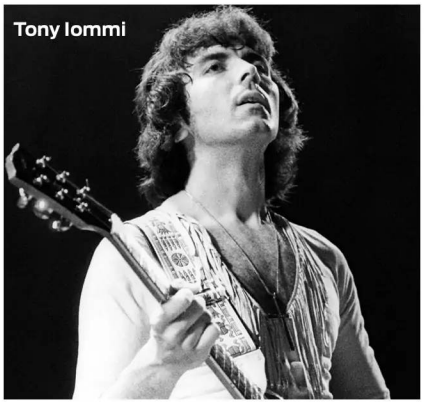
Capo 3rd fret. All tablature positions are relative to capo.
All music sounds in the key of B♭, a minor 3rd higher than written.

1973

Ex. 6, inspired by this section, be sure to pluck all the downstemmed notes with your thumb.

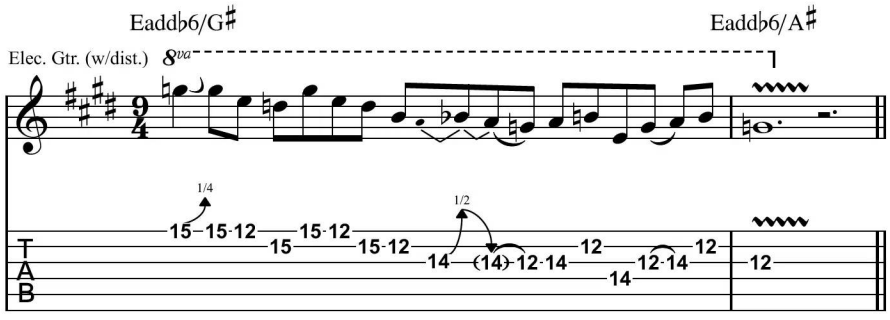
Among the lesser-celebrated albums of 1973 is *Guitar,* the debut release from bluegrass virtuoso Tony Rice. The modestly titled disc contains some blistering acoustic flatpicking. Although the guitarist would later venture into progressive bluegrass, newgrass and acoustic jazz, it is his fleet-fingered flatpicking that first turned people's heads. Rice was rightly honored with an induction into the International Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame in 2013, and in a 2020 *AP News* obituary, legendary country and bluegrass multi-instrumentalist Ricky Skaggs heralded him as "the single most influential acoustic guitar player in the last 50 years." **Ex. 7** is reminiscent of Rice's playing in the intro to *Guitar*'s first track, "Freeborn Man."

Jazz-fusion would not be outdone, as January ushered in the year with the release of Mahavishnu Orchestra's seminal album, *Birds of Fire*. Led by

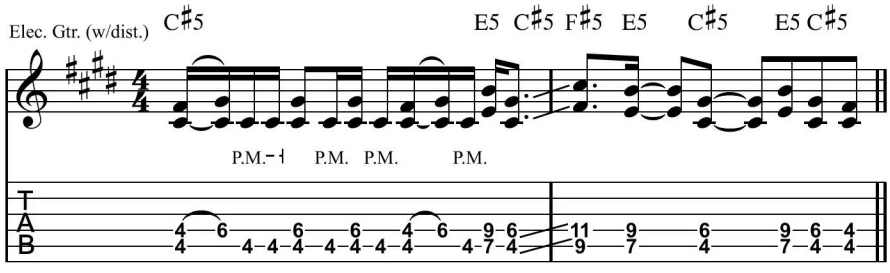

Tony Iommi

English guitarist John McLaughlin, the group would take listeners on sonic journeys with a mix of sophisticated jazz and bombastic rock. The main theme to the album's title track, which is in $\frac{9}{4}$ time, features the guitarist playing eerie, distorted melodies derived from the E minor pentatonic scale (E, G, A, B, D), cascading them over a bed of clean, arpeggiated chords. **Ex. 8** is informed by this fiery section, where the $\frac{9}{4}$ meter can be reckoned as a combined two bars of $\frac{4}{4}$ with an extra quarter note tacked onto the end, or $\frac{4}{4} + \frac{5}{4}$.

Ex. 8



Ex. 9



Our final moment is derived from a heavy metal classic, from which its main riff was conceived by one of metal guitar's founding fathers, Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi. In the title track from the band's November release, *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, Iommi's quasi-melodic use of *power chords* — comprised of just a root and 5th — in the song's opening riff can cause it to be heard as more of a harmonized single-note line than an actual chord progression, though it's surely that, too. The guitarist's massively saturated tone conveys a menacing darkness, and whereas he regularly tunes his guitar down one and one-half steps (low to high: C♯, F♯, B, E, G♯, C♯), **Ex. 9** is in standard tuning. It evokes Iommi's darkly hypnotic riff, and the song was voted one of "The 10 Greatest Black Sabbath Songs" in *Rolling Stone* magazine's 2013 readers' poll. Previously, legendary metal guitarist Randy Rhoads would give a nod to the song's riff in "Mr. Crowley," from former Sabbath lead vocalist Ozzy Osbourne's 1981 album *Blizzard of Ozz*.

There are still many more great guitar moments from 1973 to be discovered, and seeking out a complete list of the year's album releases would be a worthwhile endeavor. Be it Steve Howe's intricate parts on progressive-rock titan Yes's three-album live set, *Yessongs*, the brash playing of Johnny Thunders on glam rockers New York Dolls' self-titled debut, Robert Fripp's experimental art-rock musings on King Crimson's *Larks' Tongues in Aspic* or Frank Zappa's stream-of-consciousness improvisations on the Mothers of Invention's *Over-Nite Sensation*, the year teemed with a stunning and diverse array of releases that continue to inspire guitarists 50 years after.

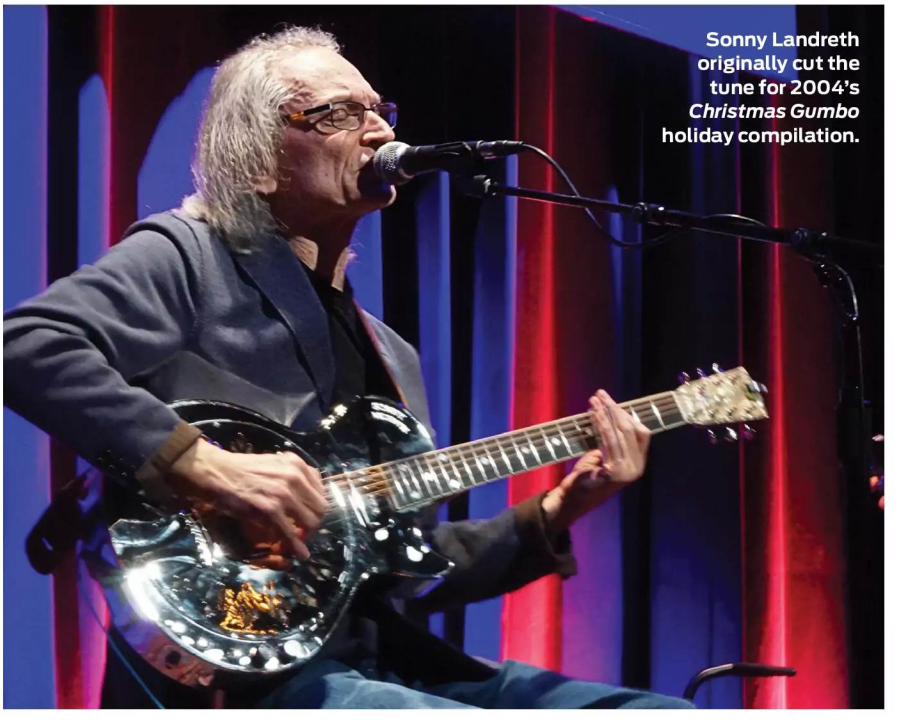
Jeff Jacobson is a guitarist, songwriter and veteran music transcriber, with hundreds of published credits. For information on virtual guitar lessons or custom transcriptions, feel free to reach out to Jeff on Instagram @ jjmusicmentor or visit jeffjacobson.net.

DAVID WARNER ELLIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Holiday Spice

Learn Sonny Landreth's "Got to Get You Under My Tree."

BY JIMMY LESLIE



Sonny Landreth originally cut the tune for 2004's *Christmas Gumbo* holiday compilation.

CARL WEINGARTEN

"THERE ARE ONLY two ways to do a Christmas song," Sonny Landreth says. "One is to go all-in on a cliché standard; the other is to come up with something totally off the wall." For those looking for the latter, Landreth's "Under My Tree" is a fabulous option. It's from a groovy 2004 compilation album called *Christmas Gumbo*, and I happened to witness some of the sessions.

Holiday songs are usually recorded during the dog days of summer for release in fall. That was the case nearly two decades ago when I was on one of my first assignments for *GP* in New Orleans. I was there for an eBay convention but mostly wound up at Marc Hewitt's Sound Services Studio. Funky Meters guitarist Brian Stoltz was gathering a who's who of the Crescent City crew to create a well-crafted Christmas album worthy of representing their scene.

Christmas Gumbo delivered a spicy selection, featuring the likes of Landreth, Allen Toussaint, several Nevilles and Stoltz, whose slinky rhythms underpin much of the music. The atmosphere was truly festive. Yours truly even added a few "ho ho hos" to Beausoleil's zydeco cut "Papa St. Nick." I never perform a holiday gig without doing a few *Christmas Gumbo* tunes, and folks eat 'em up. Here's how to play Sonny's cut.

GOT TO GET YOU "UNDER MY TREE"

Christmas Gumbo has been out of print for a long time, but today you can find it on Spotify, Apple Music and TikTok. "Got to Get You Under My Tree" has a simple chord progression, played by Stoltz, and features Landreth's lovely vocals, slide and lyrical contributions.

ROCK THE SWING

On a basic level, "Under My Tree" is a I-IV-V tune in the key of B, which equates to the chords B, E and F♯7. The intro, verse and chorus use the chords in slightly different order. The rhythm section of drummer Raymond Weber and Tony Hall crushes a modern second-line groove, with Stolz playing a super-syncopated rhythm on his Strat. The way he rakes his pick across the strings in an almost washboard-like fashion takes a ton of nuance and feel to pull off properly, but you can boil it down to a basic pattern that works just fine, even on an acoustic. Simply strum down, down-up, up-down-up in that rather typical rhythm guitar pattern.

TAKE IT TO THE BRIDGE

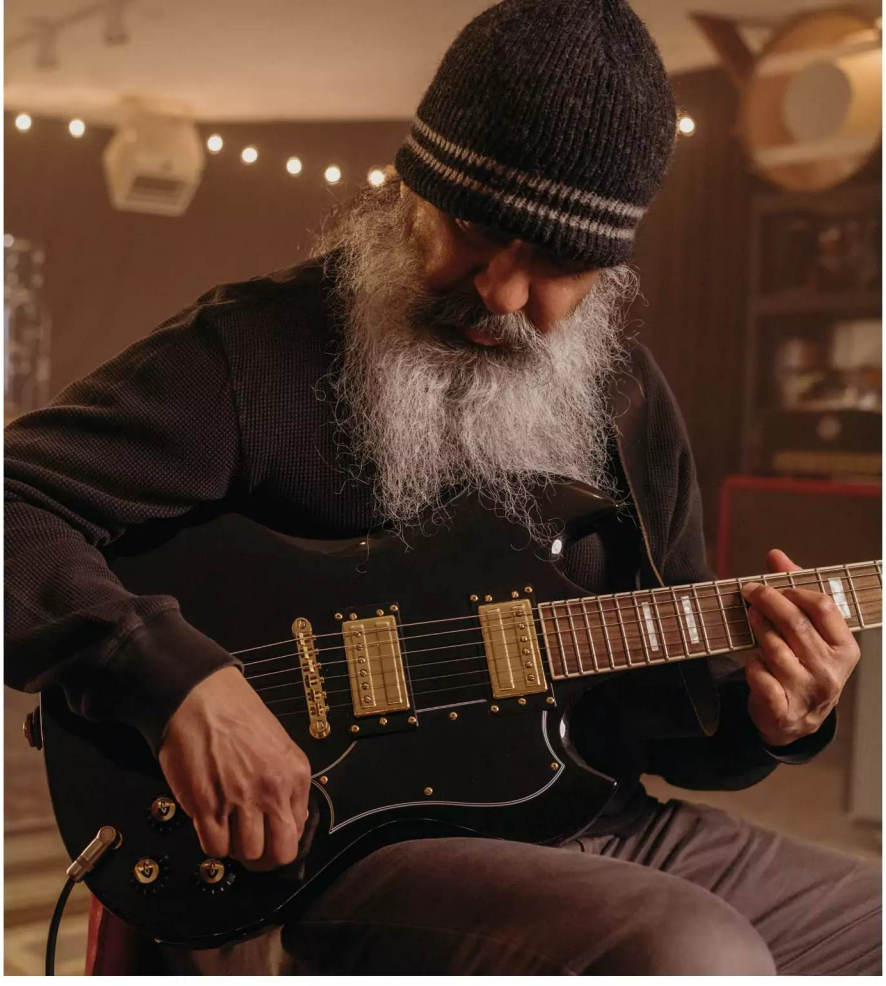
There's a hip bridge, both musically and lyrically, which Landreth reports is what drew him to choose this tune from the batch being brewed up by the songwriting and production team of Greg Barnhill and Will Robinson. The chord progression is III-VI-II-V — all major/dominant, except the sixth chord, which is minor — so that equals D♯7, G♯m, C♯7 and F♯7. The lyrics go: "I'll put on a little Dr. John and wrap you up in my arms. Tell the ghost from Christmas past, I got the spirit at last." Then there's the payoff chorus: "Got to get you under my tree, my backyard Christmas tree. Come rock the swing with me. Got to get you under my tree." Backing vocals by the Dixie Cups put the icing on this holiday cake.

GOT SLIDE?

If you truly want to heat up a holiday hootenanny, give Sonny's searing slide a go. "I played a Strat using a DiMarzio DP181 Fast Track 1 dual-rail humbucking pickup in the bridge position through a Matchless Chieftain amp they had at the studio," Landreth recalls. "I tuned up a step from Spanish open G, to open A, and put a capo at the second fret to get into the key of B. It was one of the smoothest sessions I ever did."

If only more holiday music could sound so fresh and feature such sweet guitar parts! Have fun playing "Under My Tree" this holiday season and for years to come. Merry Christmas, y'all.

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player*– and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.*



GUILD

Polara Kim Thayil Signature

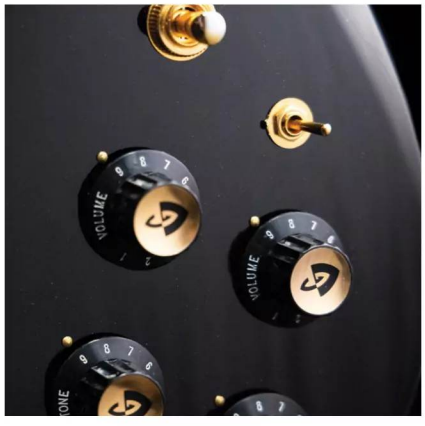
TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

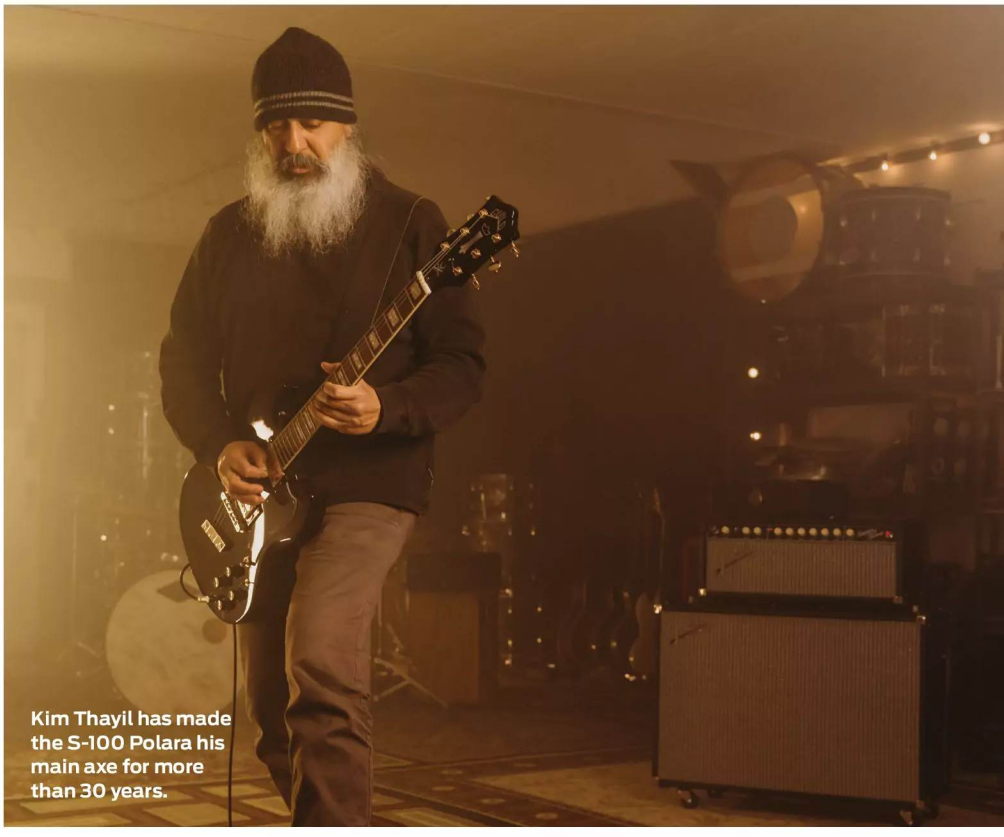
GUILD'S LATEST EDITION of the S-100 Polara — a model originally introduced in 1963 sporting a "kickstand" body shape and a distinctive spear point on the headstock — is the offset-batwing version that Soundgarden's Kim Thayil has been playing since 1978.

The model on review here — a production (read "offshore made") version of the USA-built flagship model that features premium old-growth woods and Jason Lollar pickups — has a gloss-black mahogany body and a glued-in mahogany neck with a comfortable soft-U carve. Sitting atop is a 24 ¾–inch-scale rosewood fingerboard that looks suitably upscale, with pearloid blocks and ivory binding, and carries 22 polished narrow-jumbo frets. The strings travel across a chunky composite nut before fanning outward to a set of gold-plated Grover Rotomatic tuning machines on a classic Guild headstock that has MoP inlays and a Soundgarden *King Animal* logo on the truss-rod cover.

Hardware consists of a gold-plated Tune-o-matic bridge and a compensated Guild stop tailpiece, along with a pair of Guild HB-1 pickups with Alnico II magnets and gold-plated covers. They feed a three-way toggle and dual sets of volume and tone controls, and there's a mini toggle switch that puts the pickups out of phase when set to the down position. Thayil's signature and *Badmotorfinger* scimitar are also given a gold treatment on the control cover plate.

A sweet player thanks to its slim neck and wide-ish, 12 ½–inch radius fretboard, the Polara also benefits from a good factory setup that provided low, buzz-free action and tuneful intonation all the way up the neck. A solid-feeling guitar that clocks in at nearly eight pounds, it sustains well and displays good vibrational qualities when played acoustically, characteristics that came through when it was amped-up with a Fender '48 Dual Professional and a Deluxe Reverb. The signal chain included a UAFX 1176 Studio Compressor and Orion Tape Echo, a TWA SH9 and TWA's new Krytical Mass reactive octave fuzz.





Kim Thayil has made the S-100 Polara his main axe for more than 30 years.

The Polara proved a flexible guitar that even sounded great played cleanly, and the independent volume and tone controls allowed for texturing the tones to the *n*th degree, making it capable of everything from dark, jazzy sounds on the neck pickup to crisp rhythm textures with both pickups on and cool dirty-rhythm sounds on the back 'bucker, with some pedal grind added or the Dual Pro cranked up. The phase switch is also handy for summoning funky/snarky tones when both volumes are all the way up, though it has no effect when using the pickups individually.

With distortion slathered on, the Polara went into its lead zone so naturally, it seemed purpose-built to dish out crushing grind. In situations where I could turn up, it was easy to get controlled feedback and to groove on the sustain and how chords and lines bloomed under the fingers. My only issue was the toggle switch, which on my review guitar tended to slip out of the rear position and had to be notched back to the zone. Otherwise, the guitar's tone circuit easily steered the bridge humbucker in browner or brighter directions to suit the amp/pedals and room.

The Polara's affinity for heavy rock is surely why it's been Thayil's main squeeze for so long. Kudos to Guild for making the Polara Kim Thayil Signature an affordable proposition, one that's sure to please a lot of players.

SPECIFICATIONS

Polara Kim Thayil Signature
CONTACT guild.com
PRICE $899 street

NUT WIDTH 1.692", composite
NECK Mahogany, vintage soft-U profile
FRETBOARD Rosewood, 24.75" scale, 12.5" radius
FRETS 22 narrow-jumbo
TUNERS Grover Rotomatic, gold plated
BODY Chambered mahogany with solid maple top
BRIDGE Tune-o-matic with Guild compensated stopbar
PICKUPS Two Guild HB-1 humbuckers with Alnico II magnets
CONTROLS Dual volume and tone controls, with three-way selector toggle and mini phase switch
EXTRAS Available in gloss Black or White
FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario EXL110, .010-.046
WEIGHT 7.8 lbs (as tested)
BUILT China

KUDOS A great looking guitar that plays well and has kickass rock attitude
CONCERNS Pickup switch tended to pop out of position on the bridge setting

The "Tone Master" badge aside, it looks like a tube-powered Princeton Reverb.

FENDER

Tone Master Princeton Reverb

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

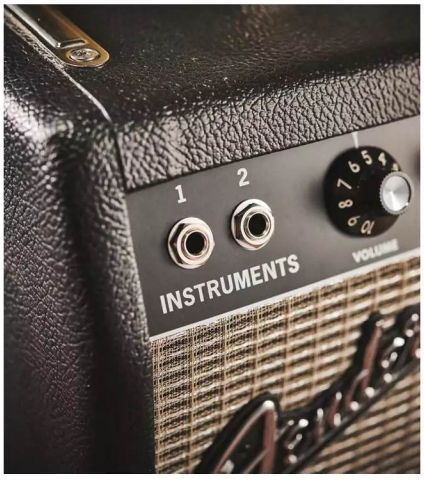
FENDER'S PRINCETON AMP began life in 1946 as a six-watt, 1x8 combo with a wooden cabinet. It subsequently evolved into more powerful and higher-gain forms through the tweed and brownface eras, before it became the iconic blackface model of 1965, which, with its cleaner sound and addition of spring reverb, made it an amplifier prized by session guitarists and working players alike. So the logical process of evolution means that the Tone Master Princeton Reverb now makes its debut as a digital version of the tube-powered classic, giving players a lighter-weight option in an amp that Fender produces in both versions.

The 12-watt, 1x10 combo on review here only gives its technology away by virtue of a "Tone Master" badge on the lower right corner of the solid-pine cabinet. Otherwise it looks pretty much identical, sporting a classic silver grille, black control panel and grained black Tolex covering. There are knobs for volume, treble, bass, reverb, speed and intensity, as well as a jeweled pilot light that glows orange when the amp is on mute and red when it's ready to rock. On the rear are the on and mute toggle switches; a rotary output-power switch with positions for .3, .75, 1.5, 3, 6 and 12 watts; a balanced XLR line out with level control and a cabinet sim switch that provides three different miked-cabinet options; and a ground-lift switch to nuke hum when connecting to outboard gear.

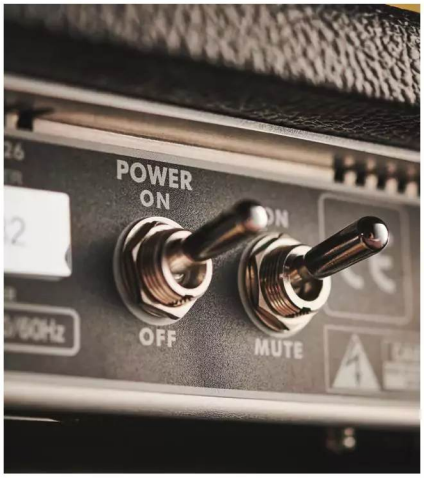
The Tone Master Princeton weighs less than 19 pounds, which is close to half the weight of a valve-powered version, and it's more compact than a Deluxe Reverb, making it an ideal grab-and-go amp for a lot of situations. Tested with guitars that included a Knaggs Severn Trem SSS, a PRS Dustie Waring Signature and a Gibson/Memphis '61 ES-335, the little Fender proved to be a toneful amp that had no problem hanging with bass and drums. It has an excellent clean sound, and the reverb is spacious, with a nice, smooth decay. The tremolo emulates the rounded volume-modulation of the classic "bias wiggle" circuit and can deliver the pulse over a wide range of speeds. Both effects can be turned on and off with the included foot switch.

THE FACT THAT IT DOESN'T USE TUBES WAS A NON-ISSUE. IT SOUNDS LIKE A PRINCETON

The amp performed well on gigs with the single-coil and humbucker guitars, and it sounded good with a Takamine TC-138 acoustic-electric. Sure, it's arguable whether it has the dynamic qualities and playing feel of a tube-powered Princeton, but I liked how



Two cabinet sims make it easy to go direct to a PA.



it sounded, and it quickly became my go-to during the course of this review when playing smaller rooms. In outdoor spaces, it was very convenient to simply plug a mic cord into the rear-panel XLR, set the cab-sim switch to taste (I generally left it on the first setting) and enjoy how the amp's balanced tones were available at any level needed through the P.A. This also proved handy for keeping stage levels on the low side, because the Tone Master Princeton can get quite loud, even though it's only 12 watts. This is obviously an area where Fender took pains to emulate the response of a tube output stage.

The Celestion C10R also stays clear and detailed at higher volumes, which is nice when pushing the amp to five or six in high-power mode. On the other side of the coin, an option for playing with less volume is using the power reduction switch to cut the wattage down to size, and the good thing is the sound stays consistently balanced when you throttle down the juice.

The fact that the Tone Master Princeton doesn't use tubes proved to be a non-issue as I used the amp more and more. It sounds like a Princeton, and that's really what counts, so I just enjoyed what the amp can do instead of getting sidetracked by how the valve version may have better dynamic feel or is louder or whatever. More importantly, the Tone Master's EQ is easy to dial in for different guitars, it breaks up in a non-harsh way when turned up to six and higher, and there's enough true-to-form realism here to make the Tone Master Princeton a sweet deal, considering it costs $500 less than a standard Princeton Reverb. All considered, it's an amp worth auditioning if you're in the market for a gig-worthy, low-watt combo that punches above its weight class.

SPECIFICATIONS

Tone Master Princeton Reverb
CONTACT fender.com
PRICE $899 street

CHANNELS 1
CONTROLS Volume, treble, bass reverb, speed and intensity
REAR PANEL On/off and on/mute switches, six-position rotary wattage selector (.3, .75, 1.5, 3, 6 and 12 watts)
POWER 12 watts
TUBES N/A
SPEAKER 10 inch Jensen C10R
EXTRAS Solid-pine cabinet. USB port for firmware upgrades. Three-position cab-sim IR selector. Balanced XLR out with level control. Ground-lift switch. Cover and two-button foot-switch for reverb/tremolo on-off included
WEIGHT 18.7 lbs (tested)
BUILT China

KUDOS Lightweight and toneful. Handy power reduction feature. XLR line out with cabinet simulation makes it easy to connect to recording gear or a P.A.
CONCERNS None

BOSS

AC-22LX Acoustic Amplifier

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

The AC-22LX has two dedicated channels for guitar and vocals.

IF SMALL IS the new big, then Boss's novel acoustic amp is huge news, because this little bugger is truly tiny. The AC-22LX is about the size of a double-wide lunch box and weighs under nine pounds. And if the battery-powered movement is one of the most exciting revolutions in amplification, here's an interesting option: The AC-22LX uses old-fashioned AA batteries instead of the trendy lithium ion. It packs a ton of functionality into its compact package and comes loaded with two distinct channels, a rhythm box, a looper, and onboard effects, most notably Air Feel models designed to deliver the airy tones of a miked-up acoustic.

The AC-22LX has a distinctly acoustic-looking brown-on-brown aesthetic that makes it look like a little sibling to the Boss Acoustic Singer Series. Controls are in two rows, mostly corresponding to the two channels: guitar beneath, and vocal above. The rhythm box and looper sections are far top right. The vocal channel is basic, with bass and treble knobs, and it's clearly designated as a mic channel, with phantom power and a single XLR input rather than a combo jack. The downside is that you can't use it to plug in a second guitar. The upside is a strong vocal signal with its own designated reverb, facilitating a distinct character.

I GREW TO APPRECIATE THE AC-22LX FOR PRACTICE OR AS A BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

The overall sound is surprisingly spacious. The 2x5 stereo speaker configuration does broaden the tone, which is warm and intimate. It becomes more expansive with Air Feel engaged and increasingly "airy" as you switch through the five simulated mic-pattern settings: Dry, XY, AB, ORTF and Mid Side. My favorite was AB, which added a natural ambience without sounding overtly effected. Reverb and reverb with chorus are available via a global control and are of fine quality. A memory button allows you to save your favorite EQ and effects settings associated with a preferred Air Feel selection.

The two main extra features are the rhythm box and a looper. The former harkens back to vintage analog rhythm devices and features tones and grooves designed to support acoustic styles, e.g. congas, cajons, claves, shakers and simple drums in various patterns from straightforward to syncopated. There's a control knob for five main patterns, and by using the tiered variations button you can access up to 75 beat boxes at various paces via a tap tempo button. The rhythm box struck me as rather quaint at first, but it's a handy practice and songwriting tool to have at your fingertips.

There is also a basic onboard looper that works just as you'd expect. The catch is that, while the rhythm box can be started and stopped with the touch of a finger, the looper requires an external trigger, and for that you need to get a Boss foot switch. I used an FS-6 dual foot switch ($84.99 street, not included) with one side designated to the looper and the other to the rhythm box. That comes with the relatively small cost of a stereo ¼-inch TRS cable to connect.

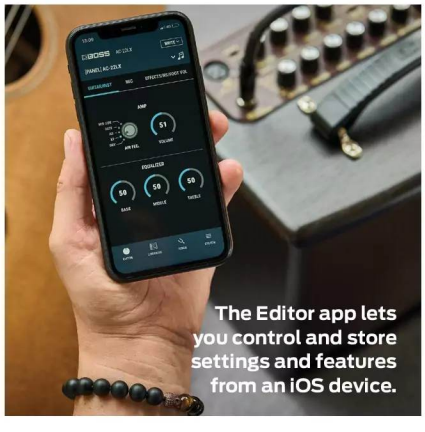
GETTING CONNECTED

Given its diminutive size, the AC-22LX offers copious (if somewhat curious) connectivity options. There's USB for computer compatibility, and even an AC-22LX Editor app you can download to control and store various settings and features from an iOS device. You can feed backing tracks via an auxiliary-in mini jack on the back, or with Bluetooth, but oddly enough the latter requires a Boss Bluetooth Audio MIDI Dual Adaptor, which costs a whopping $60. Stereo line-out is nice, but the jacks are only ¼-inch, not XLR or combo jacks, so even though there's a balanced input for the vocal, the output is unbalanced.

The decision to power this amp via eight AA batteries is interesting in the lithium-ion age. Certainly, rechargeable AA batteries offer cost savings and convenience when there's no access to power. I was at Burning

Controls for the channels, rhythm box and looper are well laid out.

Bluetooth connectivity is optional — and another $60.


The Editor app lets you control and store settings and features from an iOS device.

Man, where a rainstorm killed all access to power, and having devices that run on traditional batteries was appreciated. Boss says the AC-22LX will operate for about eight hours of continuous use on a set of alkaline batteries, and 10 hours on rechargeable NiMH batteries (nickel-metal hydride).

All in all, the AC-22LX offers quality tone with tons of options in a super portable package. That said, I wish it had 22 watts, as its name suggests, instead of a meager 10. The amp sure sounds good, but it's awfully quiet. With the volume and master at noon, you'll still hear your acoustic guitar as much as you'll hear the amp. That can be quite cool with the effects turned up for ambience, but there's barely any headroom. Three quarters is the max. Peg it, and the tone will break up, especially if you've got the Air Feel engaged.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

There's no bottom stand or side-mounted kickback stands on the cabinet, so setting such a small amp on the floor has the effect of increasing the bass response. It's better on a home desktop or a tabletop at a coffee shop, up near the ear, where it's most audible and the controls most accessible. Even so, AC-22LX will likely fall short in most gigging environments on its own. It needs the help of an external P.A. or at least a powered speaker or two.

I have a little shelf that pulls out from my office desk on the right side, and the AC-22LX fit perfectly on it. That's where I found it most useful and enjoyable, especially at night, when I could best appreciate the ambience on offer, either in headphones or from the stereo speakers up by my ears. Over the course of this review period, I grew to appreciate having the AC-22LX right there for practice or simply as a Bluetooth speaker for my phone. That's nice, but would I plunk down approximately five and a half bills for it, which is the cost of the amp plus the extras mentioned in this review to provide full functionality? That puts it in the arena of many more powerful amps, including the Boss Singer range.

In the end, it all becomes a matter of purpose. Do you want an excellent practice pal, or do you need a true gigging amp? That's what it boils down to when you consider the Boss AC-22LX.

SPECIFICATIONS

Boss AC-22LX
CONTACT boss.info
PRICE $399 street

CONTROLS Mic channel: XLR input, phantom power on/off, volume, bass, treble, reverb. Guitar/instrument channel: ¼" input, Air Feel (Dry, XY, AB, ORTF, Mid Side) volume, bass, middle, reverb/reverb & chorus. Rhythm box: pattern, volume, tap tempo/variation, start/stop. Global: Master volume, power switch, memory button to store favorite settings
CONNECTIONS ¼" stereo/mono line out, mini stereo aux in, mini stereo aux/record out, ¼" TRS foot switch, Bluetooth (optional BT MIDI dual adaptor required), USB with loopback on/off, DC in
POWER 10 watts (5 watts x 5 watts)
SPEAKER 2x5"
WEIGHT 8 lbs 14 oz
BUILT China

KUDOS Expansive tone and tons of features. Traditional battery power option
CONCERNS Very quiet. Expensive Bluetooth adaptor, specific foot switch and stereo cable required for full functionality

The six rotary controls and two three-position toggles deliver a wealth of studio-quality tones.

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

UAFX

OX Stomp Dynamic Speaker Emulator

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

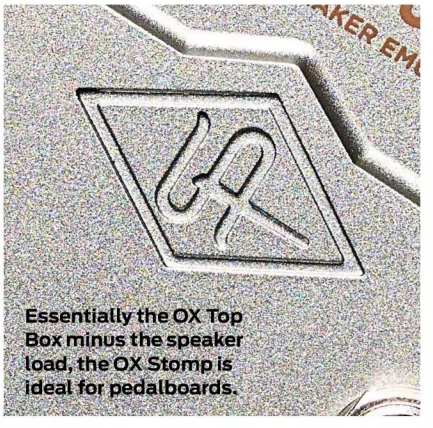
THE 14TH PEDAL in the UAFX line, the OX Stomp is essentially a pedal-sized OX Top Box without the internal speaker load. In other words, it's not a power attenuator and is designed for instrument and line-level signals only. But what OX Stomp does have are the cabinet, mic and room emulations that give players produced-sounding three-dimensional tones, greatly simplifying the signal chains required for recording and live performance.

Housed in the same metal enclosure used by most UAFX pedals, the OX Stomp has controls for room (studio ambience and air), speaker drive (dynamic response and breakup), output, mic 1 (microphone 1 level), rig (a six-position rotary switch for selecting rig presets) and mic 2 (microphone 2 level). In the middle are two switches, mic 1 select and mic 2 select, both with dynamic, condenser and ribbon settings. The two foot switches toggle rig A or rig B on/off. (Should you require, more rigs and foot-switch modes are available with the UAFX Control mobile app.) On the front are stereo inputs and outputs, USB Type-C to connect to a computer for firmware updates via the UA Connect desktop app, and a Pair button for Bluetooth, which lets you select rigs, edit parameters, store user presets and more via the UAFX Control mobile app.

I tested OX Stomp with a variety of guitars — a Gibson/Memphis ES-335, a '63 Les Paul Junior and a PRS McCarty — through studio monitors as well as into mono and stereo live setups, and it was impressive how the rigs provide such a wealth of options for creating tones. A rig consists of a speaker cabinet, two cabinet mics and room sound and effects, and each rig can be adjusted in realtime using the knobs and switches on the top panel. The rig knob selects the following configurations when you first fire up OX Stomp:

1. 4x12 Green Punch
2. 1x12 50s Twang
3. 2x12 Honkin' Silver
4. 4x10 Pristine Clean Room
5. 1x12 Roomy Tiny Combo
6. 2x12 Comfortable Lead

Playing through these presets, which range from spacious to dry and "roomy" sounding, and then using the app to assign them independently to the foot switches gives a taste of what you can do with OX Stomp, and you may be satisfied with what's on offer here. However, dozens of additional rigs are available in categories for 1x10, 1x12, 2x10, 2x12, 4x10 and 4x12 cabinets. all with emulations of various alnico- and ceramic-magnet speakers. So the sky's the limit once you dial in the sounds using the mic-type switches and mic level knobs, adjust the room knob for the desired amount of ambient "air," set the speaker drive to your preference (higher settings inject more overdriven speaker texture) and adjust the output level as needed. Storing custom rig presets within the app is a snap, and there's an edit menu where you can choose specific cabs and mics; EQ sounds; adjust compressor settings; select



Essentially the OX Top Box minus the speaker load, the OX Stomp is ideal for pedalboards.

delay modes (Dual, Crossover, Ping Pong); adjust feedback, mix, and mod rate/depth; activate chorus or flange; and tweak reverb decay, left-right balance and mix.

The setup menu also lets you configure the foot switches to toggle between A/B and C/D rigs, respectively, on the left and right switches, back up rigs, perform a factory reset and more.

The realism of OX Stomp's sounds can't be overstated, and there's a ton of ways to control the response you're looking for. You can alter the mic selections by choosing emulations for dynamic (Sennheiser 421, Shure 57), condenser (AKG 414, Neumann 67), ribbon (Beyerdynamic 160, Royer 121) and D.I. categories. And you can have them available in mono or stereo configurations for ambient room sounds, where you also have level and panning adjustments, low-cut and damping options, and even a dedicated room EQ with high, mid, low-mid, low, high-cut and low-cut sliders.

OX STOMP DELIVERED THE RICHNESS OF A STUDIO SETUP, WITH PEDALBOARD CONVENIENCE

One obvious benefit of shrinking the Ox Top Box is the ability to have all this firepower on a pedalboard. While it's nice to plug a vintage 50-watt Marshall into an OX Top Box and be able to throttle it down to country club level, often it's more likely you'll already be using an amp suited to the venue, so it's not a problem to dispense with the power-attenuation circuitry. And here's where OX Stomp rules, because it allowed me to concoct an array of rigs that delivered the lush, dimensional richness of a full-blown studio setup, and still have that pedalboard convenience of adding distortion, modulation, compression and other effects as needed. OX Stomp sounded so good that I found myself wanting to play a little cleaner, just to groove on the tones without needlessly masking them with grind. And this is also where using the new UAFX 1176 Studio Compressor in Sustain mode (which emulates two 1176's in series) can take things to a cool clean-sustain realm.

Bottom line, OX Stomp is a super-useful addition to the UAFX line because it provides all of the miked-cab-in-studio-room goodness of the OX Top Box without the space-consuming footprint. For an approach to getting great tones in a most convenient way, it earns an Editors' Pick Award.

SPECIFICATIONS

OX Stomp Dynamic Speaker Emulator
CONTACT universalaudio.com
PRICE $399

CONTROLS Room (studio ambience and air), Speaker Drive (dynamic response and breakup), output. Switches: Mic 1 (dynamic, condenser, ribbon) Mic 2 (dynamic, condenser, ribbon). Mic 1 level, rig (six-position rotary switch loads rig presets), Mic 2 level
FOOT SWITCHES A and B (respectively toggle rigs A and B on/off)
I/O Stereo inputs and outputs, USB Type-C (connect to computer for firmware updates via UA Connect desktop app), 9VDC adapter jack (400mA adapter not included), Pair button for Bluetooth discovery
EXTRAS Additional rigs, foot-switch modes and other features available via UAFX Control mobile app (iOS and Android).
SIZE 2.56" x 3.62" x 5.55" (H x W x D)
WEIGHT 1.28 lbs
BUILT Malaysia

KUDOS Delivers produced-sounding tones, complete with effects and variable room sound. Wide variety of cabinet and mic choices. Easy editing of sounds and storing custom presets using the UAFX Control mobile app
CONCERNS Bluetooth connection dropouts

SHED

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

HA-59 PAF Pickups

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

WHETHER THEY'RE MAKING pedals, pickups, amps or guitars, many small-shop builders discover that the rewards of pursuing their passion come with the headaches of running a small business. You can count pickup designer and winder Spencer Mumford among them. Shed, his one-man operation in South Wales, U.K., earned a stellar reputation for the quality of its pickups in the early-mid period of the boutique-winder boom, but shuttered in the mid 2010s after struggling with issues regarding admin, supply chain and worldwide shipping hassles. Shed re-formed in summer 2023 and now includes partners Jeff Williams and Phil Jarvis, who handle day-to-day business operations, while Mumford — known in the trade simply as "Spence" — focuses on the pickups.

Shed's wares include the set of HA-59 PAF humbuckers I'm looking at this issue. They are essentially the design formerly known as PAF Daddies, which were widely respected as one of the best repro PAFs on the market (replacement sets for Stratocasters and Telecasters are also currently available). Following the period-correct formula, the HA-59s each include two butyrate bobbins unequally wound with 42-AWG plain enamel wire and left unpotted, like the originals, atop rough-cast Alnico IV magnets. Vintage-spec hookup wire is used, along with accurate baseplates with tapped screw holes, Phillips bobbin screws, correct maple spacers, silkscreened PAF decals and aged nickel-plated covers. The set is calibrated for a balanced response between the neck and bridge positions. Our test pair read 7.53k-ohms resistance from the former and 8.07k-ohms from the latter.

Installed in a 2021 Gibson Custom Shop 1959 Les Paul, the HA-59s were tested through a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab, a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and several presets on the Neural DSP Quad Cortex. In short, the Shed HA-59 revealed an abundance of the qualities that made the seminal humbucker so popular in the first place. Regardless of their ability to reproduce the hallowed "PAF magic," the HA-59s are rich, well-balanced, and harmonically sweet-sounding pickups. They pack the punching power that players have long turned to full-size, Gibson-style humbuckers to achieve, yet with excellent clarity and articulation, too. They boast relatively full lows, sparkling highs, and enough midrange grunt to provide muscle and punch, without annoying peaks or emaciating troughs in any part of the frequency spectrum.

LEAD AND POWER-CHORD TONES WERE MEATY AND FAT, YET ALSO CUTTING AND ARTICULATE

Pairing a relatively low-wind neck and a medium-wind bridge works well toward the apparent ends of the HA-59 design. Original PAFs varied widely in both specs and sound, so there are several variations on great or authentic PAF tone, rather than one ideal. Some makers of reproductions lean toward the creamy and thick while others err on the biting and strident. These Sheds fall somewhere in the middle and do indeed capture an appealing and musical breed of genuine PAF tone in the process.

Into a cranked amp or one of a number of overdrive pedals used in testing (including a Tsakalis Six, a Victory Duchess and a Dinosaural Cogmeister [*see review, December 2023*]), the HA-59s issued eviscerating lead and power-chord tones that were meaty and fat, yet also cutting and articulate, with loads of shimmering overtone sparkle in single-note lines and unison bends. Played through a cleaner chain, they delivered the kind of sparkling clarity that leads to Tele-on-steroids comparisons for good PAFs, without the mud or sludge that too often bogs down lesser humbuckers. Expense aside, they're an aspiring pair of pickups, and worthy of an Editors' Pick Award.

SPECIFICATIONS

HA-59 PAF Pickups
CONTACT shedpickups.co.uk
PRICE $510 per pair

MAGNETS Rough-cast Alnico IV
COIL WIRE 42-AWG plain enamel coated
DC RESISTANCE 7.53k-ohms neck, 8.07k-ohms bridge
BUILT U.K.

KUDOS Balanced, rich, musical and appealing, offering an impressive take on the hallowed PAF tone
CONCERNS Expensive for a pair of pickups

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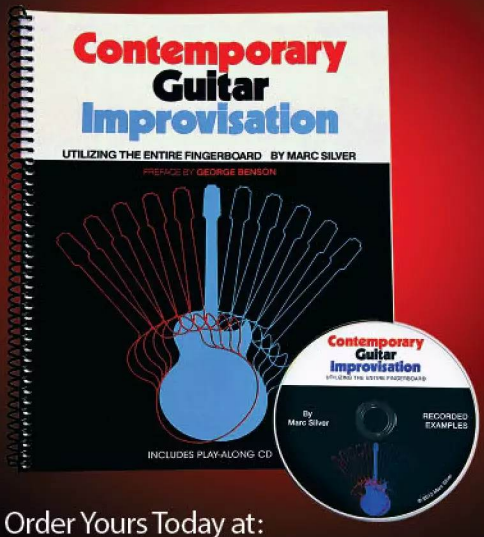

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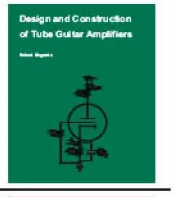

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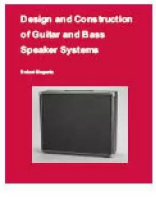

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Zakk Wylde and Ozzy Osbourne pose in Tokyo, early 1989.

How I Wrote...

"No More Tears"

Zakk Wylde reveals how a studio jam — and the Randy Rhoads school of soloing — paved the way for **Ozzy Osbourne**'s immortal 1991 track.

BY MARK McSTEA

ZAKK WYLDE KNEW he had big shoes to fill when he joined Ozzy Osbourne's band in 1987. Tony Iommi, Randy Rhoads and Jake E. Lee had preceded him as Ozzy's guitarists, and each had proven influential to his own playing. Wylde quickly found his footing, both as Osbourne's guitarist and songwriting foil, co-creating the nine cuts on the singer's 1988 album, *No Rest for the Wicked*. But perhaps no song in their shared canon stands as tall as "No More Tears," the title track from Ozzy's 1991 album, the second studio effort to feature Wylde. A large part of the record's success was Wylde's distinctive guitar work, a mix of grinding riffs and his signature pinch harmonics. But as the guitarist points out, it was all done in service of the song. "The song always comes first for Ozzy," he says. "That was an important reminder for me when it came to making 'No More Tears.'"

"I COULDN'T BELIEVE SOMETHING THAT LONG COULD BE A SINGLE. BUT HELL, WHAT DO I KNOW?"

JAM PACKED

As Wylde recalls, "No More Tears" virtually wrote itself in rehearsals for the album sessions with bassist Mike Inez, drummer Randy Castillo and keyboardist John Sinclair. "Mike was actually the instigator of the whole song," Wylde explains. "He came up with the bass line. Then Randy came in on the drums, exactly like it was on the record. They were just jamming on that groove, and then, again just like the record, John Sinclair came in with the keyboard line, so it was already sounding really great from the moment it was created. I had a slide with me, and I was thinking about all those bands like Lynyrd Skynyrd and Molly Hatchet that I liked, which was what inspired the slide lines that I started playing — almost like a 'Freebird' feel. What's funny is that the way we jammed it is almost exactly how it came out on the record."

Osbourne was quick to see the potential in what they had created. "Ozzy started singing some words as we were working through it, and then I came up with the riffs that answered his lines," Wylde explains. The crescendo leading into the solo took a little more work. "We took some time to figure out how to go into that big change in the middle for the buildup and then break down before my solo. It was all routined before we got into the studio. I'd started to come up with some ideas on the piano, and John was playing around with different inversions on the synth. I think it's really arresting the way that everything just drops out and then comes back with the piano. It takes the song somewhere else for a moment."

RANDY RHOADS STYLE

Despite Inez's role in the song's creation, the bass part was recorded by Ozzy's longtime collaborator, Bob Daisley. As for Wylde, when it came time to lay down his solo, he knew he needed to pull something special out of the bag. "I was wondering where I was going to go with the solo," he says. "It's a blues-based syncopated solo, but I really sat and worked on the crescendo parts to get something that totally clicked."

Wylde is a big fan of the written guitar solo, where the nuances are pre-planned and carefully constructed. "That's the Randy Rhoads school of soloing, where you sit and compose the solo. Things like 'Hotel California' or 'You Shook Me All Night Long' — you can't play the song without playing the solo exactly as it was recorded. I usually get a homework CD of a track so I can work on it until I get something I'm happy with."

The gear that Wylde used for the song was his standard rig at that time. "It was just my Les Paul through a Marshall JCM800 2203 and cabinets fitted with 75-watt Celestions. The solo was just the one guitar. I didn't double track or anything. I didn't use anything too fancy for the Ozzy records."

"TEARS" OF JOY

Considering that "No More Tears" tracks in at more than seven minutes, Wylde was as surprised as anyone when it was chosen to be a single. He was even more shocked when the nearly six-minute edited version became a hit.

"I couldn't believe something even that long could be a single," he says. "But hell, what do I know? I didn't think it was an exceptional track when we finished it. [*The No More Tears cut*] 'Mama, I'm Coming Home' stood out as an obvious single. I sure as hell didn't realize this would be the one song that people would always ask me about."

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